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# RAGGLE-TAGGLE





*The Gypsy Spell*

WALTER STARKIE

# RAGGLE- TAGGLE

*Adventures with a Fiddle in  
Hungary and Roumania*



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## PREFACE TO NEW EDITION

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**L**AST spring (1947) when I was wandering aimlessly about the outskirts of Barcelona, I came across a camp of Gypsy Coppersmiths. They belonged to the tribe of Cristo-jordi, many of whose members I had met in my travels through Spain and Africa in former years. These coppersmiths had wandered from country to country during the six years of war and their passports, which they proudly showed me, had been guaranteed by the International Red Cross. The chief of the tribe narrated his adventures in the drawling voice of chante-fable: they were mainly accounts of frenzied flights from police and Gestapo, and agonizing quests for food. As a primitive Gypsy, he thought of the World as a spacious garden full of fine, fat hedgehogs; "The Lord will provide" was his motto, for He feedeth the Gypsies as He doth the birds of the air; but all this harmony is destroyed by War. War is the product of the "Beng" or devil and his quadruple team of apocalyptic horsemen; a series of cataclysms that descends upon the World, leaving it as parched as the desert. "It's hard on us Romanichals," said he, "seeing that we give a wide berth to all and sundry; we don't meddle with folks, nor do we take part in their quarrels for our ways don't cross." His one obsession, was the number of bridges that had been destroyed. Being a Gypsy he looked upon a bridge as a quasi-sacred symbol, the link between one country and another. Bridges must be propitiated, because of the rooted belief that a living woman was always walled up in a bridge by Manoli, the magic builder, in order that it might defy all the devils of destruction. "Bridges are our refuge," said he, "and we always camped beneath 'em, but now there's not one standing and there'll be no

intercourse between brother and brother from one end of Europe to the other."

I have often pondered over these words of my Gypsy blood-brother and they come to my mind with special force just now when I am writing a new Preface to *Raggle-Taggle*. When I published the book in 1933 there were still plenty of bridges between the east and the west of Europe and there was no such thing as an "Iron Curtain" shutting out our Eastern brothers from the West. My diary recorded days that now seem of a different age, when Hungary and Roumania were still happy hunting-grounds for the Romany Rye who wished to catch a glimpse of the customs and way of life of those whom Cervantes called "the Kings of Nature." In spite of the inquisitive attentions of local policemen and passport officials, it was still possible then to wander from village to village over the Puszta, getting one's eye full as well as one's ear full. The Hungarians had forgotten the era of Bla Kun and his sinister red trains, the Transylvanians could still sing their antagonistic songs in strophe and antistrophe, developing their civilization, whether Roumanian, Magyar or Saxon, in point-counterpoint fashion, and as for the sturdy Roumanian farmers, had they not with them their beloved veteran farmer leader Manin?

In Budapest any enlightened friends in diplomacy such as Uncle Paul would proclaim by the hour the merits of a Customs union of Danubian states which would benefit European co-operation. Then came the fateful years when the European stage was set for the surrealist drama of rival dictatorships with its dazzling tricks of lights and sounds to hypnotize the sullen masses whose eyes, riveted on the stage, no longer saw the pitiful band of persecuted victims. Day by day the tales of cruelty resounded through the world like a "danse macabre" and men knew that Europe was again being precipitated headlong into war. Many were the accounts of persecution that I heard from Gypsies when I visited central Europe in 1936, for though Aryans they were included in the writ of extermination directed against the Jewish race. The Gypsy race, how-

ever, has always waxed strong in persecution. Ever since the Romanichals came into Europe in the fifteenth century they have constantly been persecuted by civilized humanity. They have been enslaved, condemned as sorcerers and heretics and burnt at the stake as witches in the name of enlightenment and orthodoxy. It is certain that they will weather the storm to-day as they have done all through past centuries, and we must hope that they will be the minstrels inspiring the revolt against the bullying invader of their country, be he German or Russian, as they were in the old nationalistic days of Demetrius Karman or Michael Barna. Their lives as pariahs and nomads will preserve them from falling victims to the all-absorbing mechanistic civilization which to-day threatens human liberty. They will point the finger of warning to the Magyars and Roumanians who are in danger of having their unique national characteristics obliterated by the all-powerful intruder of alien race. For though the Gypsy does not create, he perpetuates, and his significance arises from the fact that his Indian magic enables him to preserve many of the essential traditions and traits of personality of the countries wherein he has settled. Hence the peculiar power which the Gypsy fiddler wields over the Magyar and which enables him to cast a glamour over the peasantry at a fair. In Hungary there is even a saying that you can make a peasant drunk on a glass of water and a Gypsy violin. In South Spain, too, it is the Gypsy who has preserved intact the ancient style of singing, and their *cante jondo* or Deep Song is magic in its scope. The singer does not sing lilting and melodious phrases but, as they say among the Romanies, "bites the song" and hypnotizes his tavern audience by his harsh metallic tone.

A further example of how the Gypsy preserves forgotten traditions of nations comes from the famous Romany pilgrimage at Les Saintes Maries de la Mer in Provence. The wandering tribes that gather on the nights of the 24th-25th of May in the crypt of the ninth-century fortress church carry unconsciously the race memories of the primitive inhabitants of the South of Gaul, who congregated



yearly from time immemorial at the shrine of the god. Hence the mystery of the Gypsy musician, coppersmith, horsedealer, whose magic is that of the fortune-teller of whom the Indian poetess Sarojini Naidu wrote :

“She is twin-born with primal mysteries,  
And drinks in life at Time’s forgotten source.”

This hidden power inspires the Gypsy fiddler who plays the violin (the devil’s instrument he calls it) as he breathes. In infancy a violin was put in his hands and he plays it all his life, but in his own wild way, for not a note of printed music can he read ; but his eye is as rapid as his ear ; not a sound in nature does he miss and underlying all the restless ever-changing life of to-day there is the inherited folk-style and the magic of race memory which enables him, like his sister the fortune-teller, to cast the glamour over his audience.

WALTER STARKIE.

LONDON,

*Sept. 21st, 1947.*

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THE GYPSY SPELL. *By Arthur Rackham* . . . *frontispiece*

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THE AUTHOR AND AN INTELLECTUAL GYPSY

SPANISH GYPSY DANCERS FROM THE CAVES AT GRANADA

*From a Photograph by Senor Ruiz Vernacci*

GYPSY NOMADS IN TRANSYLVANIA

GYPSY NOMADS IN THEIR TENTS

TRANSYLVANIAN GYPSIES

BEAR-TAMING GYPSIES

GYPSIES IN THE PAPARUDA CEREMONY

ROUMANIAN CALUSAR (HOBBY-HORSE) DANCERS

ROMANY REVELS

THE ASS THAT PAYS THE RENT

## PREFACE

---

**T**HIS book is the record of a journey I made alone through Hungary and Roumania and it is based on a diary I wrote in spare moments, generally on odd scraps of paper in cafés, bars, tents, sometimes by the light of the moon. My only excuse for publishing the account of my journey is that a solitary wanderer becomes wearied of talking to himself and needs to share his experiences. My main object in making the journey was to try to live the vagabond life of a Gypsy minstrel who has to rely for his livelihood on his fiddle, but I wanted also to investigate as an amateur, not as a scholar, the wealth of folk music and folk legend which is so essential a part of the lives of those peoples who still listen with rapt attention to the blind rhapsodist sewing together the old songs. In Hungary and Roumania the Gypsies for centuries have played the part of minstrels and storytellers, always bringing to those countries the romance of their Indian origin. Nowadays it is not so easy to follow the example of George Borrow in a Europe teeming with police and customs officials, where the vagabond is looked on with suspicion. Nevertheless, there are compensations for the man who leaves the hotels and main roads to consort with the waifs and strays, and the principal one is the sensation of complete freedom among the kings of nature as Cervantes called the Gypsies.

My journey, however, was not all raggle-taggle: occasionally I mixed with high folk as well as low: sometimes I went straight from a hovel of Gypsies to a *cénacle* of professors and artists. But all the time I felt that I was following on the heels of the wandering folk, picking up here and there odd scraps of their lore. When I returned home I went into my library and read again the books written by others who had followed Romany.

Seated in an armchair the journey through the realms of the imagination became free and untrammelled, for there were magic carpets, seven-league boots and fairy doors in trees to aid the wanderer. And so I determined also to share my Gypsy-lovers' library with the reader, for no journey through the world would be complete without the other one through the imagination on the wings of poets. In this way, too, I hope to pay back the debt of gratitude I owe to all the writers who have helped me.

In conclusion, I shall quote the description given of me by my most truthful friend when he saw me plodding through those lands of perspiration and fantasy: "A small, stocky man, broad-shouldered and thick about the girth: complexion fresh and hair fair: jaw strong, but his face chubby and double-chinned: eyes blue and in the opinion of señoritas Nordic: eyebrows short and one twists slightly upwards diabolically: walks with ambling gait, gets easily out of breath, rests often, laughs immoderately, drinks moderately, but prefers red wine to white: has fits of melancholy, is superstitious and remembers his dreams: is quick to observe a rolling and a romping eye, but prefers an eye of gentle salutations: is never merry when listening to sweet music, and when playing a fiddle feels like Don Quixote on Rozinante. In fact the fiddle is, as Sterne would say, his hobby-horse, his sporting little filly-folly carrying him cantering away from the cares of life."

TRINITY COLLEGE  
DUBLIN

To  
EMILY AND CECIL HARMSWORTH

*Φίλων ἐπωδαῖς ἐξεπάρδομαι φύσιν*



THE AUTHOR AND AN INTELLECTUAL GYPSY



SPANISH GYPSY DANCERS FROM THE CAVES AT GRANADA *Rodriguez Aiosta*



GYPSY NOMADS IN TRANSYLVANIA





GYPSY NOMADS IN THEIR TENTS



TRANSYLVANIAN GYPSIES

BEAR-TAMING GYPSIES



GYPSIES IN THE PAPARUDA CEREMONY  
ROUMANIAN CALUSAR (HOBBY-HORSE) DANCERS



ROMANY REVELS



THE ASS THAT PAYS THE RENT

## PART I

What care I for my house and land?  
What care I for my treasure, O?  
What care I for my new-wedded lord,  
I'm off with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!

Last night you slept on a goose-feather bed,  
with the sheet turned down so bravely, O!  
And to-night you'll sleep in a cold, open field,  
along with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!

What care I for a goose-feather bed,  
with the sheet turned down so bravely, O!  
For to-night I shall sleep in a cold, open field  
along with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!  
(*Old Song.*)

## CHAPTER I

### *Off with the Raggle-Taggle Gypsies*

IT was in January 1919 that the idea of journeying to Hungary as a wandering minstrel came to me. I had been in Italy in the concluding months of the War with the British forces, travelling about from one unit to another in the mountains of the Venetian province, giving concerts in huts and barns and tents, with a Fiat lorry as a Thespian chariot to carry my vagabond minstrel companions.

One day I gave a violin recital in a Y.M.C.A. hut near the little town of Montebello and at the end after the audience had departed, I noticed five men loitering near the door. They were Austrian prisoners who were employed in rough jobs in the camps by the British Army authorities until they could secure their repatriation. One look at them convinced me they were Gypsies, for they were brown-skinned and they had the queer, penetrating eye of the Tzigan. One of them, acting as spokesman for the others, asked me timidly in Italian to let him see my violin. When I handed it to him they all crowded round and started to speak excitedly in Magyar.

After a few minutes the spokesman asked me whether I could do them a favour. They were Hungarian Gypsies who had been called up as conscripts into the Austrian Army, and they belonged to the musician class of Romanies. Could I possibly ask the Y.M.C.A. hut leader to give them some pieces of wood—any old Woodbine cigarette packing-cases would do? When I inquired the reason for this strange request, the Gypsy replied: "Ah, Signore, if you give us the packing-cases we shall make violins out of them and then *bashavav*. We are Hungarian Gypsies dying for want of music, and our blood runs cold for lack of a *lassu* and a *friss* to make us dream of the *Puszta*."



Then I remembered that among Gypsies the word *bashavav*, to play the fiddle, has a magic connotation, for it means the dance of life, the expression of the slow, sad *lassu* and the quick rhythmic *friss* that lead to the wild *csárdás*. A Hungarian Gypsy prisoner will die of melancholy in gaol unless he is given wood to make himself a fiddle. I gave them the wood and took leave of them.

Ten days later, having occasion to visit the town again, I went to see the five Gypsies, and to my surprise I found that out of the packing-cases they had fashioned violins and bows, and they were playing away like demons. So contagious was their music that the stolid British soldiers became infected with Gypsy rhythms and began to dance like Dervishes. In the end the colonel had to give orders to use the Gypsy players as a dance orchestra.

They were grotesque objects, those raw-white packing-case fiddles, and they had only a string here and there, but they worked their spell when throbbing under the devilish fingers of the Gypsies.

In the intervals of feverish fiddling they would say to me: "Why don't you come to Hungary, the country of *Mulatni*? You are a violinist and every door will be open to you once you play a Magyar tune. No need for you, Signore, to bring money or food: you can wander over the length and breadth of the *Puszta*, living on music alone."

Then one who came from Transylvania said to me:

"You must come to Transylvania, the land of mountains and forests, where the fiddle originated. We Gypsies from Kolossvár know the secrets of the violin and how it came into the world. Tell me, stranger, do you know the story of the violin's birth?"

When I declared my ignorance the Gypsy continued:

"It is a story told in Transylvania, where every Gypsy believes that the violin has a miraculous origin. Once upon a time there lived in one of the villages of Transylvania a girl whom all the peasants thought bewitched because no man would ask her in marriage in spite of her great beauty and rich dowry. She herself was in love with a farmer, but he would never cast a look her way, though she sighed

for him from morn till eve. At last, finding all her efforts fruitless, she prayed to the Devil and he said he would give her a magic instrument which would bring the young man to her feet. 'But, first of all,' said he, 'you must give me your father, your mother and your four brothers.' The girl was bewitched, as I said before, and she gave them all up without a murmur. Then the Devil out of the body of the father made an instrument, and out of the white hair of the mother's head he fashioned the bow, and out of the four brothers he made the strings and strung them across the fiddle. 'Now off with you,' said he, 'and play that fiddle into yon youth's ear and he'll follow you to the ends of the earth.'

"When the girl played, the young man followed her with his eyes set on her as in a trance. And she took his arm and both were wending their way home full of joy when suddenly the Devil appeared in their path and said: 'Now it is time for me to collect my dues: both of you have listened to the Devil's music and you must come off with me to Hell.' And off they went. As for the violin, it lay on the ground in the forest until a ragged Gypsy happened to pass that way, and he found it. And he, stranger, is playing it yet through the world, and because it is the Devil's instrument men and women go daft when they hear it, and the Gypsy alone knows its secret."

Many were the Magyar Gypsy tunes that Transylvanian Gypsy taught me in those days of 1919. He used to call me *pral* or brother, for we had performed the Gypsy ceremony of blood-brotherhood together and I made a promise to him that I would go to his country as a vagabond fiddler and mix with his folk. But ten years were to elapse before I was able to fulfil my promise. All those ten years I remembered the promise I gave to that dark Transylvanian Gypsy and it would creep into my mind at the oddest moments when I least expected it, and generally associated with the ancient tune, "Off with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!" which I used to sing to him. In the middle of a serious lecture to a University class, the diabolical tune would steal into my brain and make my body tingle for

longing to be away on the parched plain near the brown tents, listening to the sound of fiddles played at night beneath trees.

The dream would soon fade away before the grim realities of modern city life with its toga of respectability, its duties to the common weal, its self-conscious mediocrity.

Then one day at the end of the Summer University term in 1929 I decided that the Gypsy's promise must be fulfilled and I left Ireland for Europe.

## CHAPTER II

### *Fiddling my Way*

ONE day in July 1929 I set out on my gypsying expedition from my house at Masone in the Ligurian highlands. It was no easy task to convince my family of my sanity in wishing to follow the raggle-taggle Gypsies. My wife, who is an Italian, possesses the traditional Italian good sense and she has always looked with grave misgivings on my periods of Gypsy wanderings with a fiddle. She has always tried to build up in me a seriousness of purpose such as befits the father of a family. The vagabond side of my personality is an element of discord entering to destroy the solemn harmony of a life well spent in a scholar's toil. My father-in-law, a professor of the old school, a friend of Carducci, preferred to read of Gypsies in the literature of the mid-nineteenth century, but not to frequent and especially not to smell them. My escapade seemed to his Latin mind one other instance of the mad, inconsequential attitude towards life of the Northern Europeans who have always been incorrigible nomads. "Anyhow, my dear boy," said he, "I'll give you two gifts to take away with you: a camera and a tin of 'Flit.'"

The only member of the family who approved of my venture and secretly envied me was my little son aged six. He had been fascinated by the ragged *Zingari* who sometimes camped in a lane near the house when they were on their way to Genoa. One day I had even caught him in the act of bartering some of our household provisions for beads and trinkets. Gypsies for him meant a roving life of unwashed freedom and he tearfully begged me to take him away with me.

A *contadino* who worked in our garden gave me his rough costume and boots. It was very important not to be too

well dressed if one wanted to follow the calling of a vagabond minstrel and avoid the appearance of an ordinary tourist. I must not be a tourist if I can help it, for then it would be *adieu* to the tramps and vagabonds who live by their wits. What is the definition of a tourist? A tourist is a bloated snail, a traveller with his household goods on his back, crawling on his belly through the world. In peasant costume I shall not awaken the suspicions of the birds of prey who lie in wait for tourists.

And so with violin-case under my arm and rucksack on my back I set out early in the morning on foot over the mountains for Genoa. A grilling day found me cooped up in a smelly third-class carriage on my way to Venice. I wish to stress the word smelly, for during my career as a vagabond in Europe I have always found that smells are the leading motives, as a Wagnerian would say, of wandering. Whenever I look back on certain adventures I remember the smell that accompanied them. At one moment I dream of Naples and at once deep within me I seem to hear, as it were, the ceaseless throbbing note of garlic mixed with heavy Tuscan cigars and a faint odour of musk. And then Venice echoes through my mind again and again, for the simple reason that I had known a girl there called Giovanna who used to perfume her clothes with a subtle scent that whipped up my senses. She herself was not beautiful, but the recollection of her perfume met me chasing her in imagination over hill over dale as if she was the most ravishing houri in all the paradise of the Orient.

To-day in the train the smells were of various assortments. First of all there was *salame*, an Italian variety of sausage which on a hot day forms a ground bass to the rest of the harmony of smells. Mixed with onion and fish it became an aggressive *motif*. Then there was the strange and subtler scent of tin trunks with rather musty clothes within them, mingled with mothballs and camphor. Above all, the smoke of the cigars which, like incense in a cathedral, kills the odour of the faithful and enables you to be serene.

"Lei è musicista?" said a ragged son of the soil, pointing to my violin which was on the rack above my head.

"Of course, my dear sir, I am a musician—a wandering minstrel: what shall I play for you?—the Canzone del Grappa if you are an *Alpino*, the Bells of San Giusto if you are a Triestino, or 'O Sole Mio' if you come from Naples." He was an old soldier and had fought on the glorious mountain, so my playing of the spirited melody extracted a lira from him in grateful remembrance.

At Venice I halted just the time necessary to catch the train for Trieste, Postumia and Rakek, the first town on the Serbian border. As a minstrel I was in luck, for the folk in the carriage wanted music. Playing the violin in a train is an exciting experience because you sway about from one side to the other and your bow menaces the faces of the audience. Then, too, the rhythm of the wheels is more suited to the wild, untamed music of Hungary, which drives you on in vertiginous course, than to the elegiac songs of Italy. Most of the passengers seemed to be talking Italian and so I went up to a hatchet-faced man in a corner and repeated my refrain: "What shall I play for you?—the Canzone del Grappa if you are an *Alpino*, the Bells of San Giusto if you are a Triestino." The man looked at me and scowled. "What have I done?" thought I. Then I remembered that I was approaching Ljubljana and that the man was a full-blooded Serb. I hastened to play a Serbian Gypsy dance I knew, but then a chorus of voices from the other side of the train called out for "Cavalleria Rusticana," so I subsided again into Italian music. At the end of my performance I did not have to pass my hat around, for five or six men came up and put coins in my violin-case and others drew out bottles of wine to toast the minstrel. I made three lire, five dinars and one pengö before I reached Kotor. "This money I offer to thee, oh Aradia, goddess of vagabonds: may it appease the anger thou dost feel against me, a fat member of the middle class who has come as an interloper into thy bands." I hope the goddess, patron of the Minions of the moon, heard me in her witches' cave, for my purpose is to meet the tramps and Gypsies who dwell on the outskirts of civilization and prey on honest men owing to their know-

ledge of the strange music and dancing that sets their senses on fire and drives them crazy.

I wonder do vagabonds have passports? Mine was perfectly in order with its visas for Hungary and Roumania. "All the tramps and Gypsies in the world will not get you through if your passport is not in order," said the Roumanian consul at Genoa to me when I was paying him his ten-shilling fee in English money (he would accept no other). On one visa I noticed the words inserted—the bearer undertakes not to earn any money while he is in Hungary. "A petty proviso," thought I, "and hardly one to encourage the penniless foreign musician." However, I consoled myself with the thought that in the village public-houses and the peasant huts and along the roads of Hungary there would not be any Trades Unions of tramps or Gypsies.

Anyhow, on this journey no Trades Unions were going to take away the money I had made and I expended some dinars on a ham sandwich and a cup of creamy coffee before settling down to sleep on the unsympathetic wooden seats.

## CHAPTER III

### *Mulatni*

#### GYPSES—WOMEN—WINE—CSÁRDÁS

“**Y**OU know, my dear brother,” said Karoly the Gypsy to me, “there is a word in Hungarian called *mulatni* which means to enjoy oneself with Gypsies; this evening you will have some *mulatni* to make your sluggish northern blood run faster.” We were seated in the shade of a café garden in the little town of Siófok. A few yards away stretched the blue waters of Lake Balaton glittering here and there under the fierce August sun.

“*Mulatni*,” I mused, “must be a disturbing force, for it awakens in my mind thoughts of energy whereas I feel footsore and weary.”

I arrived by train at early dawn at Nagy Kanisza, the frontier town of Hungary, and still half-asleep started off with my rucksack on my back and my fiddle under my arm to trudge along the dusty roads. It was lonely and fatiguing work wandering hour after hour without a soul to talk to. Occasionally a motor dashed along, choking me with its dust, and I had not even the satisfaction of making its owner hear my curses. Modern civilization is unkind to the vagabond and even the Hungarian countryside is not ideal for troubadours. It is curious how self-centred we become when language communication is cut off. My knowledge of Hungarian was limited to three words which I had been taught by a girl in a third-class carriage from Rakek; two of the words were *Kezét Csókolom*, which, I understand, is a polite address in Magyar and I found them useful; the third was the word *Szeretlek* which my girl acquaintance told me referred to love. These words were singularly inappropriate when I asked various peasants the way. They would bow when I said: *Kezét Csókolom*,



but when I launched into German, French and even Italian they would shrug their shoulders.

At last, however, I saw the blue waters of Lake Balaton in the distance and I felt like the companions of Xenophon when they cried: "The sea! The sea!" The cool waters were an oasis to the footsore traveller. Lake Balaton is called the Hungarian Sea and the Magyar feels intensely proud of its broad expanse. On its shores I passed many cosy towns, all of them bearing the name of the lake as prefix—Balaton György, Balaton Komavárás, and Balaton Boglar. At the town of Siófok I determined to halt and rest for a day or two. And so later in the evening I found myself seated with my Gypsy friend, Karoly Arpád, the leader or *Primás* of the Gypsy orchestra in the open-air café.

Karoly Arpád is one of the well-known Gypsy violinists of Hungary and has played in Paris and in London. In the winter months he plays in a big restaurant in the town of Szeged, but in the summer he migrates with his band to the numerous little watering-places studded on the shores of Lake Balaton. With Arpád were six other Gypsies all of very different type but universally swarthy in complexion: one came from Odessa and had the high cheek-bones of the Mongolian; another came from Jugo-Slavia, but the most interesting among them was a Roumanian Gypsy 'cellist called Zsika.

Zsika, who was even swarthier than the rest, fascinated me by his mobile expression; his skin was of that beautiful copper colour that we see among negroes: his teeth were brilliantly white and his hair was black and curly. He made me think of Liszt's Gypsy protégé Jozsi at once: he was charming in manner and witty, but as dandified as Beau Brummell. He had spent all his money on beautifying himself and he had the most roving eye I had ever seen. Not a girl would pass by but he would preen himself and strut about like a Chanticleer. When playing his 'cello in the band he would lard on the expression and cast such languishing glances at some fair-haired maiden sitting at a table with her mamma, that the girl would blush and try to conceal her confusion from her strict parent.

In the cool of the evening I went bathing with Zsika, but it was an embarrassing experience for me. When I go down to the strand I go for the purpose of bathing and swimming ; not so Zsika. For him bathing was an excuse for flirtation and legitimate promiscuity with the opposite sex. The atmosphere for him was charged with the mystery of woman's presence, hand-pressing, whispered temptations, appointments for the night hours, promises of sensual joys to come.

The shore was thronged with revellers in the sunshine and bathing. Men, women and children of every age ; fat old grandmothers, buxom German housewives in thin and tight bathing-costume ; old spectacled grandfathers, lean and querulous with spindle-shanks ; pot-bellied bourgeois, hairy men of the Esau type leering at painted and powdered *cocottes* ; young Adonises bronzed and curly-haired wearing the inevitable Rudolph Valentino expression ; fair-haired North German maidens looking like sex-hungry Brünhildes ; black-haired, pale-faced Magyar women with fiery eyes.

But for the Magyar women the rest were the same as I had seen on the Lido at Venice. The Magyar women gave the exotic touch to the scene. I should describe the type as follows :

A small pale-faced girl : her hair coal black, her head small and delicately shaped as though it had been modelled by an artist ; her nose small and slightly aquiline ; her forehead so full and open that it gave a virile and Valkyrie quality to her face ; her eyebrows so thick that they seemed to form an uninterrupted straight line across her face. Her whole person was in proportion, but inclined to slenderness. The slenderness, however, was relieved by the rather full hips and by the strong easy swing when she walked. Everything else faded into insignificance when we came to her eyes : her features might not be as classical as those of the Roumanian and in figure she might not be as plastic as the Swede, but her eyes hypnotized you. They flashed sparks from their jet blackness when she became roused ; at other times they burned with luminous

serenity. In a sense she was like the Italian, but not so perfectly proportioned. She is more disturbing, for there is a mysterious wildness hidden in those eyes that beckon men on. I saw many girls of this type and they filled me with impossible yearnings. Zsika seemed to divine my thoughts, for he introduced me to one who was the wife of a Gypsy friend of his. He told me she had been his love, but he was now tired of her and had fallen a victim to a fair-haired Polish girl from Warsaw.

The dark girl, whose name was Anna, was the embodiment of the type I just described, save that she was if anything more virile. We bathed together and I challenged her to a swimming race with dire results, for she beat me easily. She had a queer contemptuous manner as though she considered men of no consequence whatsoever. Her body as she lay in the sun, in spite of the bountiful curves of hips and thighs, had the firm consistency of the athlete, and I thought of her as a young Hermes. She was not complimentary to me at first and as I walked about in my bathing-suit I felt the sense of shame of the respectable middle-aged bourgeois who has to parade in tights in front of a beauty chorus. When she saw me walk down with Zsika she burst out laughing and said, "There goes Black and White!" In her Gypsy mind there was something aggressively indecent about my whiteness compared to the tawny body of Zsika.

Anna had no physical repulsion against me in spite of my whiteness, for she soon gave me proofs of her interest. At first she catechized me severely on my past life; she wanted to know was I married, how many loves I had, and how many children. The conversation, I might remark, was carried on by both sides in bad German, for Anna knew only a few words of the Gypsy language. Soon we became so interested in our experiences that we forgot all about Zsika; when we looked round he had disappeared. Anna then broke out into a furious invective against him: she cursed him to me and said he was always playing her false. Yes, she had been his mistress more than any woman and had given him everything—why, for months on

end he had lived at her expense. Finally she burst out crying.

I was perturbed because we were in a public place and her cries attracted a certain amount of attention to me, for people, I suppose, imagined that I was the cause. But Hungary, unlike Northern Europe, is a delightfully discreet place ; scenes of passion break out very often in restaurants and violent words are exchanged, but nobody pays any attention to it. I suppose they feel grateful in their minds that their own turn has not yet come, and so they go on with their own conversation and leave the enraged couple to themselves.

I had not been brought up in Hungary and my mind was full of the complexes of suburbia. I blushed and trembled as I tried to pacify my pretty partner, who looked like one of those savage fiends who waylay men in the *Arabian Nights*. I could not understand why all this scene of passion should have taken place, for Zsika had said to me : " She used to be my love, but I've left her and there is no bad feeling on either side."

Suddenly her anger and tears ceased and she took my arm saying—" Let us go to a *Kávéház*."

After three or four glasses of *pálinka* or brandy she became wildly talkative and told me her story. She was the daughter of a Magyar father and a gypsy mother. At the age of fifteen she ran away from home and joined a travelling troupe as a dancer. After some years of vagabond life she married a cimbalom-player in Budapest with whom she was still living : " He is an old man," she said, " and cynical ; he knows that I have the devil of youth in me and, poor man, he wants a quiet life. He lets me have lovers now and then, but I must keep them secret. If he finds me out he beats me, but I like it for I fly at his face and scratch his eyes out. To-night you must come back with me and I shall dance some Gypsy rhythms for you."

I was now rather disturbed in mind by my companion ; she was too exotic for my taste. Man is a simple animal ; he loves to imagine the charm of lurid vices and his fantasy

dwells on dangerous types. But bring him up near one of those shimmering, fatal beauties and he immediately longs for his calm fireside and his red carpet slippers. As the Circe spoke to me the thrill of magic casements opening on faery lands forlorn burnt within me, but I kept repeating to myself, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" :

"O what can ail thee, knight at arms  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge is withered from the lake,  
And no birds sing."

My Don Quixote nature urged me to be a paladin and accompany the fair lady, for is not life made up of glittering exploits in lands unknown? Besides, a vagabond does not deserve the name if he is not willing to taste the pleasure of the moment. But then my sensible Sancho Panza personality would tug at my coat-tails, saying: "Why do you run your head into risks? You are a stranger in a foreign country and that girl with her Gypsy tricks will leave you high and dry and penniless if she doesn't drag up a thug to give you a bastonading into the bargain." It was all very well to argue with myself but the girl decided, for she took my arm and ordered me to bring her to the open-air restaurant where we were to have: *Mulatni*.

It was Sunday and all the tables beneath the trees were crowded with noisy people. The Gypsy band was on a small wooden platform under a tree. As soon as we entered, Karoly Árpád struck up a tune called "Hullamszó Balaton" in our honour and Anna started to sing it at the top of her voice.

Soon afterwards she told me to go up and play with the band. Árpád handed me his fiddle and I started off with the famous Magyar tune "Cserebogár" and the orchestra followed me, filling in the harmonies. When I had played in rapid succession the famous *nota* of Czinka Panna and the "Repülj Fecském," or song of the bird by Reményi, I suddenly began to play Emer's "Farewell," one of the most beautiful Irish melodies. Once I played it through by myself and the orchestra made no attempt

to accompany me, but when I repeated the melody they all came in with the rough-and-ready improvised harmony. This gift of being able to improvise a harmony on any melody is one of the most uncanny qualities of the Gypsy, for none of the players with the exception of the *Primds* could read music.

Our next event was to have dinner with the Gypsy band and a noisy group we were. Meals in Hungary have one peculiarity: every dish must be seasoned with *Paprika*, a very aromatic pepper. The commonest dish of all is *Gulyás*, a kind of meat stew with a rich sauce. Afterwards we partook of a sweet called *csorge fánk* or fritters, accompanied by Tokay wine.

The Gypsies told me that it was the national hero Rákóczi, Prince of Transylvania, who gave fame to this golden wine which is known in Hungary as the wine of kings and the king of wines. It is right that we should take our Tokay with the sweets, for it is not a dinner wine like claret or Burgundy. To me it seemed sacrilege to drink the golden liquid while seated at the table. It should be drunk when wandering beneath trees listening to the music, so that the sense of taste should linger like long-drawn double notes vibrated on the violin. In Tokay there is a bouquet that is as subtle on the tongue as Oloroso Sherry and when you have quaffed it the fragrance seems to possess overtones that resound like a note echoing on the piano-strings through all their harmonics. Legends are told of a monastery in Hungary containing a cave where Tokay was stored and such was its reputation that no one was allowed to approach save in Court dress bearing a silver candlestick. It is also said that Pope Pius IV at the Council of Trent was presented with a barrel of the wine by a Bishop as the most priceless gift that could be given, and the Pontiff exclaimed after tasting it—"Summum Pontificem talia vina decent": such wines are fit for his Holiness. I am sure that it was Tokay that Pope Leo X used to drink when Raphael came to tell him stories, and after the hunting expeditions the Papal servants would draw out the golden beakers full of nectar.

Tokay is the wine of Hungary and symbolizes the generosity of the Magyar race. Like the people it is sincere and no artificial doctoring clogs its taste. It is the wine to drink when the Tzigan tunes his fiddle and the dark girl by your side waits for the rhythmic impulse of the *csárdás*. It is the wine which leads us to the magic *Mulatni* when all the cares of the world fall away from us.

After a few glasses of Tokay the whole scene became transformed and the trees with their illuminations were a fairy wood. The music and the wine became intoxicants supplementing one another and casting before our eyes an iridescent veil through which we viewed the world. In the distance I heard the cymbals of the Corybantic dancers in Thrace as they cried out to the God of Wine and Rhythm. Music and wine gradually were producing the final orgy—woe to Pentheus, the enemy of the Bacchantes, if he approached too near the ivy-crowned band.

The music dashed on in fierce rhythmic intensity until suddenly the *csárdás* commenced. There is something solemn and terrible about this dance, for it sweeps down on a concourse of people like some fierce storm scattering everything to the winds.

The people rose hurriedly from the tables and rushed into the open space; each man seized his partner and hurried her along. Every face was tense with emotion and I hardly recognized Anna; she was as wild as a *mænad*, and without a word she rose from her seat beside me and ran to meet a young man who beckoned to her from a neighbouring table. They joined the frenzied throng. Every man placed his hands lightly upon the shoulders of every woman and she rested her hands upon his shoulders. The men worked their legs faster and faster; the women moved their shoulders as though goaded by witches; the air resounded with shouts and in the background the tinkling of the fiddles in furious speed and the groaning, inexorable double bass drove us into the never-ending maze of rhythm.

There was no class distinction about this dance of the Bacchant—lord and peasant, bourgeois and Gypsy, crabbed

age and youth—all were materials to be fused in the crucible of the God of the Dance. It was a dance of temperament and gathered force from its own momentum.

I was the solitary person who stood without the scene and yet every nerve in my body tingled as though the dancers had communicated to me their fire, but only part of my personality was affected. Instead of being swept off my feet by the rhythm, my mind began to associate this scene with others in my wandering life.

In the forefront of my mind was the giddiness, the swaying fury and the torrential music which abolished all thought. But then in the distance the dance became associated with Magyar heroism and I realized that only an unconquerable people could possess such victorious rhythms that bewitch and hypnotize. Then in a maze I saw Anna the Gypsy girl swaying like a bacchante; she was dressed in a blue and yellow muslin frock which gave her a curious snake-like appearance; her pale face was flushed and her whole body seemed to quiver as though she were possessed by a demon.

Irresistibly my thoughts passed beyond her to a former scene in a tavern at Seville where I had watched the dance of Lola, a Spanish Gypsy friend of mine. The men were formed up in a semi-circle, beating their hands, stamping their feet in time to the droning guitars. Then when the Corybantic noise had awakened the sleeping Dionysiac spirit, the girl would suddenly begin to dance as though moved by a secret spring. Hers was not the vulgar *danse du ventre* of the exportation gypsy, but a strange ancient ritual—the survival of the classic Oriental dance of the Gypsies,

Anna and Lola, the Hungarian and the Spanish woman, became the same person—the symbol of the strange mystical rhythm which has become the leaven in so many peoples of Europe, whether it be Russia, Hungary or Spain. But there was something else in the dancing of Anna which was not Gypsy but Magyar. The *csárdás* owed its origin in the nineteenth century to the tavern or *csárda* as it is called in Hungarian, and it is essentially the dance of the peasant on the Puszta. Though the Gypsy called up the



spirit of the dance, it was the peasant who imparted to it its virile intensity.

At times Anna became the strong-backed Magyar daughter of the people. There was a masculine vigour in her movement that made me think of the mothers of warriors. "No," said I to myself, "I must see the peasants dance the *csárdás* under the light of the moon on the plains, for then it will become the supreme symbol of the people."

On and on surged the frantic dance and the Gypsies did not slacken their furious fiddling and the dancers swayed as though they were dervishes. Until at last the band snapped a rough chord.

Silence.

The dancers sank back in exhaustion.

The *Primás* immediately began to play a slow lament to bring the people back to normal life and lull the Dionysian god to sleep. The end was like the *peripeteia* or "fall" of Greek drama according to Aristotelian principles where the people, after witnessing the deeds of horror which must purge their emotions, were led back to calm serenity once more by the dramatist. *Œdipus* had disappeared down the grove of Death and the chorus sang their final hymn on the inscrutable ways of the gods.

When Anna came back to my table she had recovered her former perverse, contemptuous expression. I have often wondered how Gypsies changed their expressions so suddenly. I had seen her as a bacchante, but now she resembled an idol in her passivity. She took great pleasure in telling me lurid tales about Gypsies in Hungary, for she wanted to make my flesh creep. "The nomad Gypsies of to-day are a tatterdemalion crew," she said, "and the police are pitiless in their methods against them. They are a very dangerous lot for a stranger to fall amongst and I shall tell you about some murders that took place recently. In one case a Gypsy brought a girl out into a wood, and murdered her. Do not think that his motive was simple rape: no, he was also a sadist; he murdered her in order to suck her blood!" All this was to encourage me in my wanderings! According to Anna, it was natural

that such crimes should take place, for the nomadic Gypsies in Hungary were degenerates ; in many cases the father had intercourse with his own daughter, the mother with her son. Such talk of rapes, sadism, and even cannibalism, made me think of the old authors of Gypsy folk-lore such as Grellmann and Predari, who described the gruesome legends current formerly among the peasants concerning the Gypsies. In Hungary there is still an immense amount of superstition prevalent among the peasantry, and the Gypsy fortune-tellers and witches with their Shamanism play on these beliefs. Anna was more of a peasant girl than a Gypsy and she believed those stories.

It is a curious fact that the Hungarian Gypsy musician will believe any terrible story of his humbler nomadic brethren, for he thinks himself a race apart from the general Romanies of the world.

I wanted to go to bed, but Anna insisted that I should accompany her back to her room. "Come now, you promised me ; my husband is not here and I have a bottle of *pdlinka*." Being of a weak nature and thinking it uncavalier to refuse a lady, I went to her lodgings. She had the first floor of a small house, poorly furnished but tidy. We were let in by a villainous-looking old hag, who must have belonged to the 1417 band of Gypsies. The furniture of Anna's room was poor, but in compensation the walls were hung with embroideries such as we find among the Magyar peasants. There were no chairs, but only a big bed in one corner of the room piled high with huge feather eiderdowns. On the floor were several bright-coloured rugs and on these we squatted in Oriental fashion.

I do not like *pdlinka* at the best of times, for it tastes like very rough and fiery brandy ; but Anna's spirit was as bad as Irish *poteen*. After a few glasses I felt as if I'd been drugged and I became singularly listless and apathetic. She on her side seemed to increase in vivacity and began to taunt me for being so sleepy and dull.

"Ah, you North Europeans ; alcohol sends you to sleep when you should be passionate lovers."

At that moment I was feeling the exact antithesis to the

perfect lover, for I had been thrilled by too many emotions in that day of *Mulatni* and I was jaded. Besides, there was something sinister about Anna which fascinated and yet repelled me. In the back of my mind I watched myself coldly and critically as though I were gazing at a grotesque, middle-aged Adonis being wooed by an unrepentant Venus.

Anna then said : " I shall dance for you." She started to undress with rapidity. Her blue and yellow muslin frock, her petticoat and underclothes slipped off as though someone had pulled aside a curtain.

My impulse was to turn away, but in her nakedness she advanced towards me and started to dance, humming a tune at the same time.

I bethought me of my violin which I had left in the corner of the room. I seized it and started to play a Hungarian Gypsy rhapsody. On she danced as I played.

Now I felt secure, for as I played my thoughts and emotions all centred in the music and her white body became a distant figure like a Tanagra statuette set on a pedestal at the end of a shadowy hall. The music too seemed to sublimate her dancing and take away all traces of self-consciousness.

She was the model and I was the painter, for why should not one paint in sound as well as in colour ?

She became the eternal Gypsy with reminiscences of Russia, of Spain, of Hungary in her movements as she passed from the slow improvisation to the presto finale. Who knows how long we should have continued this performance if suddenly we had not heard a knock on the outside door ? Anna gave a gasp and stood still listening intently. The old woman crept noiselessly into the room and whispered in her ear ; Anna turned to me excitedly : " It is my husband ; I thought he was at Budapest—what shall I do ? Quick, get away from here."

I felt in my dazed mind all the sensations of the rat caught in a trap, but not for long, for the old woman pushed me into another room and pointed to a window. Grasping my fiddle-case I climbed on to the ledge and found that luckily there was not much of a drop to the

ground. As I stood there I had a last fleeting vision of Anna amid a cloud of frills and flounces and then I jumped down into the street.

As I hurried back to my lodgings by devious routes I mentally thanked Anna's husband for his consideration in knocking at the door of his own house. If he had followed the English husband's plan and carried a latchkey, the law of husbands would have claimed another victim.

Next morning I remembered with considerable trepidation what happened to the Second Kalandar in the *Arabian Nights* when the Genii brought back the objects he had forgotten in the Princess's apartment, and I half-expected to see Anna's husband appear in my room carrying some incriminating handkerchief or button which I had forgotten.

I thought it best to leave Siófok for Budapest.

I have not seen Anna since.

#### CHAPTER IV

### *On the Road towards Budapest*

#### VAGABONDS AND VAMPIRES

**M**Y adventure with the perverse Anna had cleared my pockets of cash and it was necessary to set about earning something soon. My first experiences were not encouraging. Before leaving Siófok I played at a corner of the street near the railway station, hoping to attract the people who descended from the excursion trains from Budapest. But though I played hard for one whole hour not a solitary coin was thrown to me. Most people passed me by without stopping. Then four little boys came and stood by, making faces at me. At last three fair-headed, athletic Germans accompanied by three Nordic valkyries came up and asked me to play a waltz for them to dance. After exhausting my repertoire and my powers of resistance they departed, having handed me forty filler or fourpence.

I came to the conclusion that a vagabond minstrel should never select a summer resort for his sphere of operations. The people there are sure to be *blasé* members of the middle class who regulate meticulously their life in its tasks and amusements. When they want to dance or listen to music they go to the dance-hall or to the kursaal concerts, but they never seek for music at odd moments of the day when they are in the streets or out on the hills or in the forest. The vagabond minstrel must wander about the countryside where there is no competition of kursaal or dancing-hall and where the peasant, when he is not working in the fields, needs the minstrel to come to him and work a spell upon him.

I set off from Siófok on the country road towards Budapest. It was a grilling day and my legs were not

yet used to tramping. I walked heavily on my heels without any fixed rhythm and so by the time I had covered eight miles I was footsore and weary. I then remembered how a tramp had once told me that it was much easier to go on for hours and hours if one jogged forward on the point part of the feet in a shuffling gait, always keeping to the same rhythm. "Once you fall into the jog-trot," said he, "you move mechanically and feel no fatigue."

One of the greatest aids to the amateur tramp is singing. The hard-footed, seasoned tramp does not need to sing, for his muscles are pliant and responsive, but the tiro needs to sing aloud to enable him to forget the painful creaking of his stiff joints. I had started off lustily in the morning singing in a loud voice "John Brown's Body," because it reminded me of war days and marches in France and Italy, but somehow or other "John Brown's Body" did not adapt itself to solitary tramping in peacetime. I found the rhythm flagging and unconsciously I turned to the more languid "Little Grey Home in the West." To sing that tune was a sign of weariness, for nobody can tramp in time to waltz rhythm.

The glaring noonday heat descended upon me like a pall of molten copper and all thoughts of music faded away. Fortunately I soon came to a cool spring beneath some trees, where I rested. One of the most fatal things for a tramp to do is to rest by the way, for when he gets up to start on his road again he finds his limbs stiff and he has lost the impulse of the rhythm which had carried him on his way before. I was feeling woebegone when suddenly I came upon a group of hikers who were singing in harmony as they stalked along. They were Austrians and the songs they sang were of two kinds. First they sang sentimental German ballads and then when their steps began to flag they enlivened themselves by rollicking songs that resounded through the woods like pæans to the countryside. They were all dressed in khaki suits and shorts and on their shoulders they carried rucksacks. Hiking was no strain to them, for their bodies were steelled to hardships

and their faces were as tanned as shoe leather. With that joyful crew shouting the steps to which we were to march, it was not difficult to advance. But after I had plodded on with them for several hours I felt a longing to return to my solitary wandering. The whole pleasure of wandering consists in travelling alone and it is folly to try to join up with others in a spirit of communal enterprise. When I journey alone I like to divide myself into two personalities and make the two converse together. In company with others we must always sacrifice our own individuality in order to achieve the greatest happiness for all. The Austrian hikers made me feel depressed, as though I had strayed into a future age when all Europe would be crammed with hikers in khaki shorts carrying rucksacks on their backs, travelling along the roads in thousands, all singing the same rollicking outdoor songs which they have heard on the radio, thinking the same thoughts, eating the same food, putting up at the same wonderfully efficient hostels. The only joy of the vagabond is to shun that hiking world and try to meet outcasts, Picaresque knaves, Gypsy vagrants who would be ready to pillage the khaki gentlemen if they thought it worth while. I determined to leave my companions, but it was not easy, because they were most civil and generous, and I did not want to wound their feelings. They were on their way to Budapest and they offered to find me very cheap lodgings with them under the ægis of some international society. At the town of Lepsény, which we reached after a weary trudge, I determined to lose them, and I hit upon an excellent expedient. I said to the oldest member of the party, who looked like a college professor out on a reducing holiday, that I was very hard up and I wondered if he could possibly lend me some money. He gave me a startled look and whispered to his companions. They then very ceremoniously lifted their hats to me and stalked away. I had broken one of the cardinal rules of good-breeding among hikers by asking for a loan of money. Hikers always bring just enough money for the bare necessities of life and it is considered bad form for anyone to possess a surplus.

At Lepsény I had more good fortune than at Siófok, for in a small café I met a lonely woman who wanted my music. We were the only occupants of the café, with the exception of a sleepy waiter, for it was the siesta-time. The woman with a yawn pointed to my fiddle and asked me to play. As there were no Gypsy musicians who might have claimed the spoils, I played for the woman, and she gave me a pengő for my pains and stood me a bottle of beer. Thus fortified I set out again along the road towards Budapest. The state of my finances did not permit me to look for lodgings on the way, for my wallet contained the exact sum of two pengős and forty filler, and this sum had to last me until I reached Budapest, where some money was deposited in my name at the *Postę Restante*.

Travelling along the roads in Hungary is a pleasant experience, because the Magyars are a hospitable and agreeable people and the roads have not yet become impossibly motor-ridden. The roads, in fact, still exist for the horse vehicle and the pedestrian, and many varied types may one see in the course of a day's wandering. A great many peasant carts passed me on their way back from fairs, and the majority would slow down and offer me a lift. Then there were many vagabond types trudging towards Budapest, the Mecca of their dreams. I met a soldier in a very ragged uniform ambling back to his barracks after furlough. He had more money than I had and insisted on treating me to wine at every inn we came to. I tried to pay him back in fiddle music, until I found that each Hungarian *friss* I played made him drunker than he was before and there was danger that he might become a total casualty. Pedlars there were in plenty along that dusty Budapest road, sharp-eyed, crafty little fellows, all with an eye to the main chance. One of them who was hawking silk patterns and bead ornaments insisted on playing on my fiddle and then wanted to buy it from me for fifty pengős! When I refused to part with it he became threatening and I began to wonder whether my legs were fleet enough to escape. What should I do alone and defenceless on the plain of Hungary without a fiddle?



No other resource had I save the power of playing tunes, and that coarse brute of a pedlar might seize my violin or else break it in the course of the struggle with me. Ignorance of the Magyar language proved my safeguard, for the man, after loosening the floodgates of abuse upon me in that language and seeing that I remained unmoved, began to hesitate and pause. I suppose he expected me to retaliate in equally forceful language, whereas all that I could do was to reiterate firmly: "Nem szabad, kőszönöm." Finally I avoided him by dashing down a side lane to where some peasants were standing.

Beneath a clump of trees near the village of Tács I came across a few Gypsy tents, but their inmates were so dark and sinister-looking that I hesitated before I approached their leader. He was lying on the ground asleep and around him three scrofulous youths were amusing themselves by firing stones at a mark on a tree with deadly-looking catapults. As soon as I appeared there was a shout and from all sides there gathered a host of naked children, naked-breasted women, dogs and villainous men. They did not understand the words of Romany I fired at them, but they thought that I was a luscious object to prey upon and they felt me all over, thrust their hands into my pockets, pushed me about and acted generally like a pack of mangy dogs smelling a juicy bone. I felt helpless. All the Borrow, the Leland, the Wlislöcki I had read was of no use to me. I tried to resist their onslaught, but in vain. The stench of their grimy bodies mingled with the pungent smell of garlic stifled me, and I could feel on my neck the soft flutter of countless bugs and lice that had forsaken the verminous Gypsy rags. At last I managed to grasp in my hands the forty filler the Germans had given me at Siófok and then with a wild cry—"Ja Ke beng," I cast the few coins far from me into the ditch at the back of the tents. As soon as they saw the coins fly away all the Gypsies let go with one accord and dashed away wildly in search of the treasure, all but one fellow who had his arms round my neck. With a shove I liberated myself from his clutches and darted back on to the main road.

Two of the boys then turned and began to fire pebbles at my retreating figure, but on this occasion the gods were kind to me and the missiles whistled around me without reaching their mark. The Gypsies soon gave up their chase, for I was on the main road and a Gypsy will always respect the King's high road, and it is only when the traveller forsakes the highway and turns aside into the lonely green lanes that the Romany tribe find their prey. As I wandered along, puffing and blowing through my recent exertions, I thanked the gods that I was alone on my expedition. Supposing some friends had accompanied me on the quest of the raggle-taggle Gypsies and expected me to play the modern George Borrow, what a disappointment I should have given them ! "What a strange kind of Gypsy-lover you are ! Why, they routed you out after five minutes and you did not draw a single word of Romany out of them. What an inglorious ending to your meeting with Gypsies !" I felt ashamed with myself and I wondered why all the authors I had read on Gypsy adventures had not given any advice as to what course should be adopted in such circumstances. In George Borrow's adventures with Gypsies he was always the Romano *rai* and the noble patron who looked on the Gypsy with benevolent tolerance. He was always able to answer the Gypsy back in his own lingo and meet blow with blow and insult with insult. When it came to wrestling he was able to throw the Flaming Tinman and any other champion of the roads, aye, and box round after round without losing his freshness. There was only one occasion when the Gypsies got the better of him, but it was not in fair open fight. Like Hercules, he was defeated by a woman, and it was Mrs. Herne who played the part of Omphale. She it was who baked the poisoned cake that laid him at death's door out on the Moor. Borrow was a giant, and when he wandered among Gypsies he described his exploits as feats of Gargantuan prowess. There must have been occasions when he was unable to take the front of the stage, but like a good story-teller he omitted those paltry incidents and preserved only the adventures which would show him off

as a romantic hero. Nowadays it is very difficult for the Gypsy-lover to act the romantic part in tourist-ridden Europe. To have been romantic I should have lain bleeding on the ground after my struggle with a great number of Gypsies. Then, gathering the pieces of my violin which had been broken in the fight, I should have crept to the nearest village and telegraphed for press reporters to take down my grim story which could be published in the papers next day with the heading in capitals : " English Professor Mangled by Gypsies after Fierce Struggle. Professor acts the minstrel but fails to soften heart of Gypsy Amazons who leave him for dead on the plains of Hungary." Alas ! I had no thoughts for any romance or publicity. I only felt conscious of my own complete powerlessness in the midst of the evil-smelling band, and I felt bug-ridden, lonely and despondent. If I had only been a boxer or a wrestler, instead of a flabby-muscled musician, I should have played a more glorious part. But then I consoled myself by remembering the advice of a friend who had lived out in the wilds of Africa among Zulus : " When you are among primitive races and you are attacked, don't hit back : it is much better to turn the other cheek : it is no use standing up to fellows who are much tougher than you are. My advice is : turn the other cheek and see out of the corner of your eye if there is a side-exit handy."

It was now dark, and I determined to spend the night in the open, for the air was balmy and the moon made the country look like fairyland. In the daytime the meadows looked parched, the roads were dusty and the heat was exhausting, but at night on the Hungarian plain there was a delightful, cool breeze and everything in nature seemed to awaken to life. The moonlight shining through the trees carved everything into queer, fantastic shapes. In some places the white light made the foliage look like silver filigree work ; in other places the branches became shadowy, ghostly forms. It is difficult to explain in definite words the sensation of mystery and romance that the wayside traveller finds in Hungary. The scenery seen by the light of day is uninteresting, for the whole country is

just a huge plain. But at night in the moonlight the fields of corn, the clumps of trees, the little knolls here and there become meeting-places of fairies. It is the mixture of races that has given to this countryside its poetical charm. To the Magyar mind all that country is inhabited by invisible beings that spring to life when the sun goes down, and I have met peasants who were afraid to wander in the light of the moon for, as they said, the fevers descend on the earth when the moon rides in the sky. The primitive Magyar is pantheistic in his attitude towards nature and translates this sentiment into the little folk-poems he improvises to the sound of his rustic flute or the Gypsy's fiddle. The Hungarian projects his personality on to his external surroundings. The forest is in mourning because his love lies on her death-bed ; Sari has sowed violets and awaits their growing because they symbolize the home-coming of her lover ; the shepherd tending his flocks by the Tisza river looks up at the starry sky and thinks of his mother far away in Transylvania or his sister sweeping her room with rosemary boughs. In the northern countries of Europe the scenery is more majestic than the Hungarian plain, but the peasants do not look on their country through the veil of their own folk-lore or folk-music, nor do they associate each legend and melody with definite events in their country's history to the same extent as the Magyar does. Every step that the lonely traveller makes through the plain is accompanied by songs, dirges and dances until his mind echoes and re-echoes to a mighty symphony composed of countless fragmentary tunes.

I halted for the night at the foot of a knoll where there was a small rustic graveyard nestling peacefully in the moonlight. At the back of a big sheltering tombstone I made a fire of twigs and prepared to bivouack in Gypsy style in this desolate spot, feeling sure that no one would come to disturb me in a cemetery. I had some cheese and bread in my rucksack and my wineskin was full. As the night continued and the fire burnt low I began to feel acute melancholy and loneliness. I was sorry that I had chosen a graveyard for a bivouacking ground, for grave-

yards brought thoughts of Vampires and Werwolves to the mind. I tried to dispel this attack of the shivers by music, but my violin sounded harsh and discordant like a *danse macabre*. I nearly dropped the bow in terror, for all of a sudden there was a soft whirr of wings and something brushed past my face : it was a bat. Round and round the bat circled like a spirit of evil omen and I thought of "Dracula" and shuddered.

When I settled down I found that sleeping out of doors, even on the torrid plain of Hungary, is not an unmixed enjoyment for the traveller whose skin is not as weather-beaten as that of a Gypsy. The night became for me a series of hopeless struggles with mosquitoes and every other species of stinging insect. As long as the fire was burning merrily the insects gave me a wide berth, but later on in the shadows of the night I heard the ominous high note like the tuning of countless violins by a phantom orchestra and the hordes began their descent upon my unarmed flesh. Soon I felt my face swell under their attacks and sleep became an impossibility. At night, too, in Hungary, in contrast to the day, there were spells of cold and the sleeper in the open would feel his limbs stiffen. When I lie awake in the country all my senses become extraordinarily keen and sensitive to sounds. On that night I understood how the Hungarian peasants people their country graveyards with vampires ; I heard the crackling of twigs and I imagined I saw two fiery eyes gleaming at me from behind some bushes. Then something dark darted beside my leg and I fancied it was a rat. Even in normal life at home the proximity of a rat would fill me with a sickening anguish, but here I felt inclined to shriek my helplessness. Another distressing feature of outdoor sleeping was the prevalence of such crawling beasts as earwigs and woodlice, not to mention the sprightly flea. When I started to doze in a short period of respite from the mosquito orchestra, I felt an ominous tickling sensation on my neck. I found that a legion of ants was advancing in extended order over my body.

After a dreamless sleep I awoke suddenly at the sound

of a dog yelping near by. When I looked up above my tombstone I saw at the other side of the cemetery a light burning over one of the graves. For a moment I thought that I was still wandering through the halls of sleep, but then the horrible thought struck me that I might have been unlucky enough to enter a vampire-haunted graveyard. The yelping of dogs and the flickering lights over graves were sure signs of the dreaded vampire. My first thought was to take to my heels, but the whole scene seemed so eerie and unreal that my feelings of curiosity overmastered my fear and I stood my ground. The flickering light came nearer and nearer : I then saw that it was a small lantern carried by an old man who was hobbling on a stick and tugging after him at the end of a rope the dog I had heard yelping. He was a strange little old man like one of the goblins in Grimm's fairy stories. He walked with bent shoulders and his long white beard nearly touched the ground. His clothes were ragged and grimy, but here and there they were patched up with pieces of gaudy colours. So loosely did this ragged raiment hang on his cadaverous form that he seemed to be clothed in a garment of reeds mixed with the plumage of birds. So emaciated was his face that he looked like the figure of death in the mediæval masquerade. He hobbled over to me and rasped out some unintelligible words in Magyar. I then answered in German and he continued in the latter language. "What are you doing in this graveyard?" said he. "Don't you know that the tomb you are resting on is haunted by a *nachtoeher*? When I saw you in the distance I took you for one of them and I made the sign of the Cross to drive you away. Look here, *mein Herr*, look on that tombstone and you will see two holes : that is the sign that the tomb is inhabited by a vampire : at any moment before dawn it might fly forth and attack you. Have you no garlic upon you to stop up those holes and prevent the foul demon from coming out?" The little old man's voice rose to a shriek as he spoke and his eyes were those of a madman. "I tell you no one can escape those vampires once they begin to go after you : I have striven for years

to escape their visitation, but they have taken everything I have in the world and they would take me were it not for my prayers." So saying he pulled out of his coat a crucifix of black wood and blessed himself, muttering prayers in a low voice all the while. As he prayed the dog kept up an accompaniment of snarling and growling, as though it was terrified of something. The old man then called out to the dog trying to soothe it, but the beast slunk behind him and began to tremble violently. "Look at my dog," said the old man; "he knows the werwolves are about and he won't approach that grave."

For a long time we stood motionless by the tomb, while the old man continued to ramble on in his rasping voice and told me his story. From time to time I had to interrupt him to say that the fire had burnt low and that it was necessary to add sticks. I was terrified to stay listening to stories of vampires without the protection of a fire, for the old man's superstitious nature had already infected me and I felt that all this experience had something supernatural about it. We sat by the fire and the old man's voice gradually droned me into a state of drowsiness and my eyes would close involuntarily. Then he would whine out in a shriller tone and I would awake with a start.

#### THE OLD MAN'S STORY

"You wonder why I talk thus about vampires. My story will show you that I have good cause to fear their terrible vengeance.

"I was born in a village near Budapest, of peasant stock. As a young man I left my homestead and wandered afar, taking the rough with the smooth. I fought in the Turkish War of 1878, and as a legacy was left a wound which crippled my left leg, as you see. The soldier's life in those far-off days was a cruel one, and more than once I thought my greatcoat was to be my shroud. From being a soldier I became a commercial traveller and wandered from village to village in Turkey and Bulgaria. It was at the town of Rustchuk that I met a very beautiful Bulgarian farmer's daughter and paid court to her. I married her and we

came to settle down in Hungary in the town of Szeged. Three children we had, a boy and two girls. The boy, who was called Sándor, grew into as fine and strapping a youth as you would see any day : why, he was as reckless and daredevil as a young colt on the Hortobágy. Aye, it was horses ruined him, for he would wander off with dealers and the copers and there was no holding him at all. I was glad the day came when he put on the grey uniform and I thought army discipline would tame his spirit. After his service he returned home, bringing with him a stranger whom he introduced to the family as his benefactor. He confided to me that the stranger had helped him on more occasions than one when he was in difficulties through gaming debts and had lavished money on him. Naturally we all welcomed the stranger as the friend of Sándor, and he soon looked upon our house as a home. At first I was astonished at Sándor's infatuation for the stranger, seeing that he was at least twenty years older, but then I saw that it was the older man who pursued the younger. He monopolized my son's attention : not a thought would come into the latter's head which was not inspired by the stranger, and from being a wild, irresponsible youth he turned into a silent and thoughtful man, always day-dreaming. The stranger had something Mephistophelian about his appearance : he was tall and thin, with aquiline features and a small pointed beard. His eyes were strained and had a wild look in them like those of a cigány : his mouth coarse and brutal, with very red lips, and when he spoke he would frequently lick them and show his teeth, which were brilliantly white and sharply pointed like those of a dog or wolf.

"He was the life and soul of our family, for he had a soft, caressing manner, in spite of his sudden fits of passion when his eyes would blaze and he would show his canine teeth. He would come and visit us in the afternoon and delight us by his many accomplishments. He was the man of the world and we were the humble village folk whom he was pleased to honour. There was something fantastic about the stranger who had travelled all over the world



enduring exciting adventures, and Julcsa, my eldest daughter, would call him the fairy prince, and she said that he was sent to our house by the *Délibáb* or *Fata Morgana*. We never knew when he would come, for he gave us no warning of his arrival in the town. He seemed to glide in unperceived, and after some days of consecutive visits he would suddenly depart on the pretext of urgent business. I could never find out what his business was, for he contented himself with telling me that he had to travel far and wide. As time went on Julcsa became more and more attracted towards him. She would sit for hours listening to his stories of travels and he seemed to hypnotize her by his cold, piercing, grey eyes. Everything about the mysterious stranger thrilled her: his brown, close-fitting squire's costume, his polished top-boots, his purple neck-tie, which gave him the air of an Oriental prince, his long white fingers like those of a woman, with sharp nails cut to a point. Poor Julcsa, she was distracted with love for her cavalier, and she would confess to me with tears in her eyes that she loved him madly, but she was always terrified lest he might one day vanish away into the distance like *Lohengrin* on his fairy swan.

"My wife had always looked with misgivings on the stranger in spite of all his charm. 'He is an adventurer,' she cried, 'and he will seduce our Julcsa and then depart in the night like a thief.' In my mind I agreed with her, but I sympathized with Julcsa. When we tried to reason with Julcsa there were tears and lamentations. I could see she was hopelessly infatuated and I was afraid she might do something desperate. The best course seemed to me to say farewell to the stranger and forbid him to visit our house any more. Our leave-taking was stormy, and I saw a look of demoniacal hate in his grey eyes and his mouth was twisted into a grimace of sardonic triumph. In order to distract Julcsa's thoughts from her sufferings we closed our house and went to live for awhile in the country near *Temesvár*.

"One night when all the household had retired to rest and all was as still as the grave, I heard the sound of

horses' hoofs clattering on the road. The night was dark and misty, but when I looked out of the window I saw dimly in the distance a carriage drawn by four black horses galloping away in a cloud of dust. I am naturally superstitious and the sight of those four black horses paralysed me with horror, for I knew they were of evil omen. My first impulse was to rush into Julcsa's room. She was not there. The bed was tossed and one of the sheets twisted into a rope hung from the window. On the table I found a note saying: 'Dearest Father and Mother. Forgive me for what I am doing and pray for my soul. Julcsa.'

"I cannot describe for you the grief of all of us. We searched high and low, we informed the police, we searched the country for miles round, but no definite news did we get of Julcsa. As so often happens in such cases of disappearance, many came forward to say that they had seen her here or there, accompanied by an elderly man, but the clues led to nothing. As for my wife, she was convinced that Julcsa had been carried away by a vampire and what agonized her more than the loss of her eldest daughter was the terrifying thought that Julcsa if she once came into the power of the vampire would turn into one herself. 'The stranger was a vampire,' she cried. 'Did you not notice his pointed teeth, his red lips? The four black horses were his and he now possesses her body and soul. When he has sucked her blood she will become as he is and haunt us to our ruin.' She spent her whole day in prayer. Each moment she thought she heard poor Julcsa crying out and she fancied that Julcsa would appear in the night in the form of a bat to haunt her remaining daughter Sari or else Sándor. She hung crucifixes in every room and at night she would insist on hanging garlic leaves over Sari's and Sándor's bed to protect them. Her mind gave way and she would wander aimlessly round the house with a vacant stare on her face calling out Julcsa's name and blessing herself as though to exorcize her. Some months after that I followed her hearse to the cemetery.

"As for Sándor, he left home after his mother's death and I was left alone with Sari in our house of mourning.

From time to time Sándor wrote to me telling me of his life. He had obtained employment as a clerk in an office in Budapest and from his letters I inferred that he was satisfied with his humdrum life. Then for a long time I had no news of him until one day a letter came telling me to go at once to him as he was seriously ill. When I arrived at Budapest I went straight to his lodgings and I found him lying in a filthy room looking as if he would die any minute. He was as white as a sheet and he could just open his eyes and give me a sad, weary smile. The doctor, who was standing by his bedside, told me that Sándor had not many days to live for he was in the last stages of galloping consumption. All the life seemed to be ebbing fast from my son. At times he would cry out faintly for Julcsa and he told me of a strange dream he had had. He dreamt he met her outside the arched gate of a city and she stood within the arch and beckoned to him to enter. She was dressed in dazzling white and looked radiantly beautiful and happy, but her face was as white as her dress and her lips were like a scarlet wound. She beckoned again and again to him, but though he strove hard he was unable to cross the threshold of the gate. Then he awoke in a state of terrible anguish, and he felt so weak that he thought he was going to die. He could not understand the reason why he had felt so sad, for the dream had been a happy one and Julcsa had seemed so radiant. Night after night the dream repeated itself and on each awakening he would feel the sense of overwhelming weakness. Then one night in the dream she had drawn him through the arch and he had followed her through the town and along a road until they came to a clump of trees where he saw grey tombstones dotted about. Sándor used to rave for hours incoherently, trying to recall the place where he had seen the tombstones. 'If I could only remember the name I should know where to find Julcsa,' he cried. Each day he became weaker in spite of the doctor's treatment and the drugs that he consumed. But I knew that all the medicine in the world would be of no avail, for it was Julcsa's spirit which was consuming him.

Just as my dear wife had done, I placed garlic plants about his bed and a crucifix over his head. At night I never left him alone and I would watch him tossing about in the bed trying in vain to find peace. There was a look of wild yearning in his face and he would mutter the name of Julcsa again and again. I knew that he was hypnotized by her spirit as a humming-bird is by the snake's eye. Every prayer that came into my mind I said over him and every incantation I had learnt from old Gypsy women, but it was in vain. At a certain moment of the night I would feel drowsy, and a mist would gather before my eyes. After dozing off momentarily I would awake. Sándor would be sleeping peacefully, but his face would look still more deathly than before and from the corners of his mouth I saw a thin stream of blood trickle down his white neck. Each hour I watched by his death-bed became more terrifying than the last, for I watched him gradually change from my poor, dying son into the deathless vampire, ready to work evil on others. Then one night in the midst of a troubled sleep he suddenly shrieked out: 'The tombstones, the tombstones: I know where they are: I can see the trees and the low wall. The name of the town is Lepsény. Go through the town and then along the long road mile after mile until you come to the graveyard.' When he awoke he was so exhausted that he would not speak and he did not remember his dream. But my mind was made up. I determined to seek out the graveyard and discover Julcsa's tomb and rid the world of the terrible vampire. After handing over the care of Sándor to a trusted relative I set out from Budapest accompanied by an old Gypsy woman I had known for many years. She was to be my confederate in the grim task which lay before me. She was one of the 'cohalyi,' as the Gypsies call the witches in Hungary, and as we tramped along the road she muttered incantations in the intervals of giving me advice how to rid myself of the vampire pest. When we reached Lepsény we turned back along the road and after a weary search we came to this cemetery where you and I are seated now, and I discovered that it tallied with the

description my son had given in his dream. Tomb after tomb we examined and after a long search we came to one in a corner on whose stone the name Julcsa was engraved in big letters. She had died the year before. How had she died? who had closed her eyes? Did she die in poverty and if so who had raised the tombstone over her grave? Who knows?

"The night after I had discovered the grave I returned with the old woman to carry out my grim task of liberation. It was a stormy night, the wind was whistling through the trees, and rain and sleet lashed our faces. No moon was shining and I thanked God for that. A moon would have exposed our sinister work and perhaps drawn the suspicious peasantry after us. At midnight I started to dig down into the grave while the old woman stood by and muttered incantations. After digging for some time I knocked with my spade against the coffin. The sound of the spade striking the coffin filled me with such horror that I nearly fainted, but the old woman called sternly to me to break open the lid with the spade. With difficulty I did as she commanded, and when I had wrenched open the lid I gazed on all that remained of my poor Julcsa. For a moment I thought I was the victim of an hallucination, for Julcsa looked as if she were sleeping peacefully. Over her eyes there was spread a filmy substance and her lips were bright red as though she had recently fed on a loathsome repast in the land of the living. Again I hesitated, for my eyes were riveted on the corpse in the coffin. Again the old woman's sharp voice broke in upon my meditation: 'Make haste and use this knife. You must cut her head off and bury it in another part of the cemetery. If you do that her spirit will trouble you and your family no more.' The old hag with these words handed me a sharp knife she had brought with her and straightway began to gather twigs to make a fire near by. Hardening my heart I tried to do her bidding, but my strength failed me. The witch then seized the knife from my hands and with one slash severed the head from the trunk. I shut my eyes, but it seemed to me as if the corpse moaned and the blood spurted

over me. After fastening down the coffin-lid and piling the earth over it we buried the head in the opposite side of the cemetery, and we departed on our way towards Budapest. Before she took leave of me the old woman said : ' Be sure to go back to that cemetery and pour wine on the grave of your daughter, for there is nothing like wine for laying the ghost to rest.' When I reached my son's bedside I found him at death's door, but he had no longer the wild look in his eye, only a serene peace, and he was just able to beg my prayers before he died. I buried him in the same cemetery as his sister, and once every month I come to visit the two graves. To-night when I came in here I was frightened when I saw the fire, and I was afraid someone might have discovered my secret."

The old man, after finishing his story, led me over to the opposite side of the graveyard, where he pointed to a recently erected tombstone, and on it I read the name Sándor.

Dawn was now breaking and the air was grey and misty. The old man, pulling his dog after him, and I made our way out of the cemetery. At the top of the hill I saw a woman coming towards us. The old man said to me when he saw her : " There is my daughter Sari : she always comes to fetch me after my long night's vigil." The woman when she came near us ran up to the old man and kissed him. I then saw them depart on their way towards Lepsény.

I turned my face resolutely towards Budapest.

*A Vagabond in Budapest*

LIFE in Budapest moves to a more rapid rhythm than elsewhere in Europe, as though every moment of the day had unlimited possibilities of emotional excitement. In the morning early I was awakened by the deafening noise of cornets, played on the landing outside my room by a group of three fat men. They were out for the day and this vigorous music was their morning tonic. Down in the street I passed a band of urchins playing drums and flutes as they marched along.

Nearly every little pleasure boat on the Danube resounded with singing and saxophones. The music at this hour was insolently gay, for the Budapestian was out to enjoy himself. However gloomy the shadows may be that overhang Budapest in her economic life, the Magyar will not steep himself in misery, for his emotional nature gives him great powers of resistance. As my old landlady said to me: "We Hungarians are poor and we have a maimed country, but as long as we can sing and play and dance *csárdás* life is full of joy." And everywhere there is feasting. Along the Danube are countless little restaurants in the open air with the tables prepared for the motley crowd. When the sun shines the scene sparkles and a vision of many colours passes before our eyes.

Everyone seems to carry packages and baskets, for the shady glades in the country call rich and poor from the city—some go to the islands of Szent Endre on the Danube or else to Visegrad and Vác. As for me, I prefer to wander through the streets, which are full of picturesque vendors wearing red fezes and shouting out as they hawk their wares. Rugs, shawls, cheap jewellery are the objects sold by those Levantines who remind us that Budapest is the beginning of the Orient. Nobody hurries through

the streets, and every man seems ready for amorous adventure.

A Hungarian friend of mine rebuked me for walking fast through the streets. "You behave exactly as if you were in New York," he said. "Here our streets are full of variety and there is only one way to enjoy yourself—never hurry. If you walk fast no girl will ever notice you. If you drag your feet as you saunter down Rákoczi Street, the girls will stop to speak to you." Following my friend's instructions I dragged my feet, and sure enough a dark-eyed girl smiled at me, and when I followed her she stopped and spoke to me. She was a pretty little thing with a pale face and eyes that pierced right through you. She was poorly but tidily dressed and had a bunch of wild flowers in her hand, for she had come from the woods. Conversation was very difficult for she spoke no foreign language and my knowledge of Hungarian would have shone only in a restaurant. So we walked on, conversing mainly by signs. On and on we went interminably and I wanted to go away from the girl, but I could not think of a phrase in Hungarian that would convey my meaning. At last we reached the poor suburbs of the city, a quarter called the "Hungaria Körut." On all sides were queer little inns and shops with grotesque old people sitting in the doorways. The home of the girl was in a dark courtyard which opened on the main street. After entering the high gateway we made our way to a small one-storey house. It consisted of an entrance kitchen and a living-room. There I met the girl's mother, a hard-faced woman of about fifty-three, who was busily occupied wringing the neck of a chicken. When the difficult operation had been done, she made me sit on a faded sofa and began to ask me questions. Nothing is so tantalizing as to have questions fired at you in a foreign language and be unable to know exactly what is said. I faintly understood that the mother was talking about a son of hers who had been killed in the War, for she handed me a photograph of a youth in Austrian uniform. Then she took a violin and bow down



from a peg on the wall and set it before me. It was a dilapidated old fiddle with only three strings, and the bow was yellow and rosinless. I started to play some Hungarian melodies, following the lead of the girl as she sang. Then the mother started to weep and moan and wipe her eyes with her embroidered apron. When I turned round towards the door I saw a host of curious heads bobbing up and down outside in the street: the neighbours were as fascinated by the music as if I had been the Pied Piper. Every time I stopped playing some invisible singer would start a tune and the mother and the daughter would both nod violently at me until I tried to play the tune. Later on I went with both of them to the open-air restaurant—a rough but characteristic centre for this poor district. It consisted of a courtyard half-roofed over and half under thick trailing vines. At the back of the vine pergola was a small stage for the Gypsy orchestra, which was also roofed over. The tables were arranged in the covered portion of the courtyard. This night it was raining cats and dogs and every few seconds forked lightning lit up the sky. The rain fell with such force that all the tables under the vines had to be abandoned, and so we watched the orchestra through a curtain of rain glistening in the red, green and blue lights. The whole place was crowded with young men and young women and the old mother led us over to a table where there was a party of three men and three girls.

After a bounteous repast of ham, cutlets, paprika, gherkins and potatoes, washed down by beer served in long thin glasses, everyone became very talkative. Some of the young men knew German and translated my remarks to my two companions. Unfortunately, whether it is a Hungarian foible I know not, but they took infinite pleasure in twisting everything I said the wrong way. They would tell the girl that I was in love with her and wished her to pass the night with me. The girl would blush and the mother would cast a look of furious interrogation at me. Then another one of the young men would pile up some more meat and gherkins on the

mother's plate and she would relapse into her steady task of eating. They would also tell me in German lurid stories about the girl and her mother: that both of them were well known in the district as the most arrant hypocrites. The girl, they said, had already given birth to two illegitimate babies by different fathers. "Men like her," they said, "but then the mother pokes her nose at them and they forthwith take to their heels rather than carry her burden as well as the daughter's."

In such a party there was only one thing for me to do: stand drinks all round, for I had an uncomfortable feeling that we were all gradually sliding towards a scene—one of those scenes that break out with sudden ferocity in Hungarian taverns. Luckily my attention was diverted by the Gypsy band who began their performance.

It was not a royal orchestra, for it only consisted of fiddle, drum, and piano. The violinist was a melancholy-looking Gypsy with pale face and black tousled hair. As soon as he saw me he started to play to me as the stranger. His colleague who played the drums was a singer and when he sang, for some unaccountable reason, he would put on a tall hat. The tall hat, I observed, was not introduced solely for the purpose of local colour, for at the end of each series of songs he would pass it round to be filled with money by the public.

After he had played to me I took out my violin and started to play some Russian melodies, such as the well-known "Red Sarafan." As soon as I started he said to me—"Oh, my wife, she is a Russian. You must play them for her." He then persuaded me to go up on the stage and play with his companions. At the end of every piece they would demand beer, and the waiter would bring it and they filled my glass, and I was amazed at their lordly liberality.

At the end of the evening, however, the waiter handed me the entire bill and I realized that I had been the host. It was my last financial show, for not a penny did it leave me to get back to my room, which was miles away at the other side of the city.

The Gypsy violinist, however, had a proposition. He wanted me to meet his wife and play the Russian melodies for her, and would I go back to his rooms, he would give me a bed. Feeling weary I accepted his invitation and we set out for his home, which was in a courtyard near the house of my friends, the mother and her daughter, whom we accompanied to their door.

When we arrived at the Gypsy's house there were no lights in the rooms and he cursed roundly, saying that his wife must have gone out. She was however asleep on the bed, and her husband, when he found her, awoke her brutally and introduced her to me.

She was a most striking-looking woman. She was dark-skinned with beautiful features and with a certain harmony in her lithe body. Her face was oval shaped and her eyes were deeply set. In her movements she was a panther, and every action was brusque as though she had always been driven since childhood to seize an impulse. In her relations with her husband she was surprisingly submissive, for he seemed to take a malicious pleasure in brutalizing her. He would continually taunt her and she would maintain a dogged silence for a time and then suddenly her eyes would blaze and she would rap out viperish words at him.

To me she was courteous and gentle, and she conversed in queer broken French which was very charming to hear from her guttural, low voice. She came from the South of Russia, near Kiev, and was a dancing-girl. As she spoke tears began to trickle down her cheeks and almost unconsciously she began to sing Russian Gypsy songs in a plaintive voice that had enough metallic quality in it to remind me of the eternal chanting Gypsy.

The room was dark and the one candle with its fitful light deepened the shadows around the girl as she sang. It is curious how emotion gathers force and momentum out of itself.

The girl began in a low voice, but gradually she increased its volume as she became more and more transported by the music.

The scene faded out of my mind and I imagined myself in a castle hall described by Liszt when he listened to Gypsy singing-girls of Moscow. The samovar is lit up and the bluish flame looks mysterious. One by one the blazing lamps and candles go out until the scene is illuminated only by log fires. The men drink in silence until the perfume of Ananas and citron has created desire in the women. Then the orgy starts with the dance. The old women, excited by rum, join the younger ones, and the scene becomes a Bacchanalian frenzy, and the dancers become so giddy that they form a compact group in order to stand, until at last complete exhaustion descends upon them and they all fall senseless to the ground.

Such was the scene her singing evoked in me. Her husband seized his violin and started to play a mad *gopak* and the girl then followed the movements faster and faster. She was now a completely transformed woman, and there was an air of fierceness about her which riled her husband, for he suddenly stopped playing and began taunting her again. As soon as the music stopped she resumed her mask of indifference.

Soon afterwards they went to bed in an adjoining room and let me curl up for the night on a sofa in a corner. It was a long time before I could sleep, for the door of their room was open and the man kept on nagging at the woman, and then she would try to mollify him, but to no avail. When sleep did come it was restless and I seemed to chase somebody from one dream into another through a vague twilight world.

All of a sudden I awoke and found myself standing on the cold floor. Where was I? All was dark around me and in that queer state of semi-consciousness I could not imagine where I was. For a moment I kept trying to find a way back into my couch at home, but then nothing seemed to work out right. I hit my foot against a chair, which rattled on the floor.

There was a shout from the other side of the room and a pair of iron hands seized me by the neck. We struggled on and on madly until a match was struck

and in the light I recognized the Gypsy. Being a sufferer from somnambulism I had walked in my sleep into my host's bedroom, and how was I to explain my presence? The Gypsy would accept no explanation: he cursed me and vowed I had stolen into the room to seize his wife while her husband lay asleep. Then amidst this hubbub the woman awoke and began to shriek and bellow as though all the demons in Hell were lacerating her flesh. Soon there was pandemonium. Then noises were heard outside and a patter of feet. Throngs of people came in to see what kind of murder had been committed.

As for me, I felt like an arrested murderer as one after another man and woman came up and scrutinized me from head to toe. And to tell the truth I was not a sight for the gods. I had divested myself of my coat and trousers when I lay down to sleep, and I was dressed only in rather inadequate pants and a thin vest.

At moments of trial like these the only satisfaction is to maintain a fierce and dogged silence. Besides, even if I could have brought myself to speak no one would have understood my Hungarian.

At last an idea came into my mind. I took up a violin that was on the table and handed it to the enraged Gypsy. At first he turned on me in a fury, but then suddenly something seemed to break within him and he started to play on the instrument. Then everything calmed down to normal: the Russian girl covered herself with a sheet, for she was all but nude; the murmuring neighbours began to sing and the hectic night finished in tranquil serenity. Outside the moon was cold and silvery—a balm to us. In the distance I heard the melancholy tone of the *Tárogató*, the flute-like instrument of Rákóczi, national hero of Hungary. Its soothing tone lulled me to sleep.

*Budapest's Island of Joy*

## GYPSY VIOLIN KINGS

**I**N the Danube at Budapest there is an island full of wooded glades, where the population of the city loves to disport itself. As you approach it in a little boat you hear the discordant sounds of countless jazz orchestras, the lilt of Viennese waltzes, the chatter and the shouts of countless trippers. This is Margaret's Island, the Coney Island of the Magyars, a miniature and refined Coney Island with beautiful promenades through woods to mitigate the promiscuity of cafés, restaurants, bath-houses, slot-machines and bars.

I could not help feeling a sense of weary sadness when I reflected that this park, now crowded with trippers, was originally a place of retreat and meditation. In the Middle Ages, in the days of King Béla IV, there were only cloisters and nunneries here. The ruins of the Convent of Saint Dominic are a mute reminder that it was here that Margaret, the daughter of King Béla IV, lived. She was a beautiful soul who devoted her life to the relief of poverty and sickness.

To-day few of the shouting revellers in the bars, or the lovers with arms entwined who wander through the dark alleys, recall that saintly woman in her retirement. As I walked about under the trees I heard in the distance, booming over the Danube, the church bells of Budapest. Dusk was falling, and through the haze countless lights began suddenly to twinkle.

After a time I came to a restaurant with tables set out invitingly under trees, near flower-beds and flashing fountains. This was the celebrated Marcus restaurant, the best in Budapest. It is here that Magyari Imre, a Gypsy Violin King, performs every evening, to hosts of admirers.

Magyari Imre is a name to conjure with in Hungary, for he belongs to a famous old family of Gypsy minstrels. He is known all over Europe and nobody visits Budapest without going to hear him play. He can tell you all the international gossip of the day: whether there is going to be a revolt in Yugo-Slavia, or a change of government in Germany, or a financial crisis in Wall Street. People still tell you in Budapest of the scenes that took place when his father died: how the streets of Debrecen were crowded with pilgrims from all Hungary who had come to play in the funeral procession.

As I mounted the steps leading to the central and covered part of the restaurant, I saw him standing at the top between the two gigantic columns that support the edifice: he was playing a long, slow *lassu* and his orchestra was droning after him.

Magyari Imre is a strange-looking person. He is enormously fat and carries his protuberant bulk on puny legs. His face is pale and dark like the typical Gypsy, and his bright eyes pierce through the enveloping masses of fat as though they were gimlets. As he plays he walks about the balcony, and during a pause on a note he conducts a conversation here and there with *habitués* of the restaurant. Sometimes he walks far away from his accompanying orchestra, then one by one they creep up silently behind him to support the harmony. No restaurant Gypsy player in Hungary is the equal with Magyari Imre for brilliance and style. His rapidity of execution is remarkable in one so weighed down by adipose tissue, and as a player he is as vigorous as a young steed racing over the plains without the slightest trace of effort. After finishing some hair-raising *csárdás* he sat beside me mopping his brow, rising up every instant to acknowledge the storm of plaudits from the crowds seated on the verandah, or in the illuminated garden beneath. The more I looked at him the more I was fascinated by his grotesque appearance. His expression is queer: he looks at you fixedly without moving a muscle in his face, for his layers of fat are an outer covering which keeps him away from the

outer world. Outwardly he is a fat, prosperous bourgeois, who plays in the smartest restaurant of Budapest at a large salary and drives home at night in a sedan car to his luxurious villa. I can imagine that villa. It would be furnished in the most conventional style, as though the little man had taken the greatest pains to banish anything which would recall the exotic tradition of the Tzigan. I am sure Magyari Imre is proud of the transformation that has taken place in so many of the Hungarian Gypsies who have become settled citizens of the country. He feels no mania for wandering through the world from Transylvania to Timbuctoo. "Only the third-class Gypsy players go abroad," he said to me; "it is a confession of their weakness: when they cannot find an audience in Hungary, they go to London. I have gone abroad to Paris and to London, but only for a short engagement, and I was always eager to return here, to Margaret's Island, where the great old Gypsy King, Bihari, used to perform." I have never seen Magyari Imre's wife, but she should be a fair-haired Juno, an antithesis to the dark-eyed daughters of his race.

When I asked him about nomadic Gypsies who wander about the country, he seemed to be slightly offended. "No greater insult could be given to one of the musician Gypsies than to confuse him with one of the nomadic tribes which infest the country. As for the Romany language, it is only spoken by the wanderers and generally not understood by the civilized Gypsies. I myself understand a little, but my knowledge, such as it is, was picked up from some tramps in my home town of Debrecen."

He went on to tell me of his education, at the Conservatorium, but he admitted that among Gypsies, however trained they may be in Western music, the great inspiration of their lives is the bulk of traditional Gypsy airs, handed down from father to son. "When the child can walk," he said, "the father puts a tiny fiddle in his hand and makes him mimic the players in the orchestra, for there is a great mass of unwritten music which is played by the Gypsy violinists, and among them are many



which are never played except among Gypsies themselves." I was surprised to find that he was less chauvinistic than the other Gypsies when he agreed with me that they had created very little music. "I agree," he said, "with Béla Bartók when he says that the Gypsy transforms and sometimes even deforms Magyar music, but I hold that there would to-day be no Hungarian music at all if the Gypsies had not for hundreds of years preserved it by their playing. And is it not obvious that in the course of time melodies should change in accordance with the idiosyncrasies of each player?"

If Magyari Imre hates the wandering race for its improvidence and thieving, he nevertheless has the greatest admiration for the minstrels of Hungary of the past.

"Alas!" he said, "no longer may we enjoy such tunes: to-day the Gypsy has a hard struggle to keep up the standard of the bands, for the virus of jazz has entered Hungary. In Budapest and in the principal towns all the boys and girls want to dance to jazz because America has brought in films which are the criterion of modern life."

And Magyari Imre is passionately patriotic about his Tzigan music because he believes that it is the only music which speaks to the Hungarian soul. The Magyar needs the Gypsy to stir up in him ancient recollections of the country's glories and all that imported, mechanically-constructed music can only dim the spirit of Hungarian nationality. It is remarkable how intensely patriotic the Gypsies are in Hungary: they will not allow a word to be said against their country and they vigorously assert the superiority of the Hungarian Gypsy musician over any other race.

After our long conversation, punctuated at various intervals by rhapsodies played by him with the orchestra, a tall, lean, dark-complexioned man came up to Magyari, put his arms round him and kissed him on both cheeks. This was Brenkacs János, a Gypsy violinist who had returned to Budapest from Cleveland, Ohio, where he

was leader of a band. With him was a florid-complexioned individual called Lieber, who was his host for the evening. Both Magyari Imre and Brenkacs called for bottles of wine and began a vigorous series of reminiscences. We consumed one bottle after another of the dry Hungarian wine and the two Gypsies rattled on in conversation. I remained silent and as for Lieber, it was he who always paid. Every time Magyari Imre played, Brenkacs would take out his note-book and write down the name of the piece. At the end when he came back to our table, puffing and blowing and wiping the perspiration from his face with a towel which he kept for the occasion, Brenkacs would greet him in the following terms: "Éljen: nobody is your equal, master." Magyari Imre would then bow and both men would stand up and drink to one another. After a few minutes Brenkacs would repeat the compliment to his friend's virtuosity and solemnly, without a smile, the two would rise and repeat the toast. This ceremony went on every few minutes throughout the evening until two o'clock in the morning.

Magyari Imre in his violin-playing has continued the great old tradition of the Hungarian folk players of a hundred years ago. At my suggestion he played for me many of the original works by Gypsy composers such as Bihari, Czermak, Czinka Panna, Reményi and Dankó and in the moments of rest he related to me anecdotes from the lives of those bards of the Gypsy race. In the Bihari period the violin reigned supreme in the countryside, for there were no machines in those days for the mass production of music and the violin was the thyrsus wand to awaken the singer as well as the dancer.

According to Magyari Imre, János Bihari was the greatest figure of all and the one who carried Gypsy music to its highest perfection. Every *Primds* or leader of a Gypsy band in Hungary from his day down to modern times looks upon himself as a descendant upon whom has fallen the mantle of the great patriarch who played for the assembled monarchs at the Congress of Vienna.

Indeed, it is probable that the lofty social position of Bihari in the early years of the nineteenth century has been the real cause of his fame among the Romanies to-day. I can imagine the lean and hungry Gypsies in cafés looking back with envy to that great old Gypsy who was the favourite of kings and emperors. "Remember," said Magyari, "he was born in 1769, the same year as Napoleon, and he was a Napoleon of the fiddle, I tell you. He played the dictator all over the countryside and no festival was complete without him. Like the traditional Gypsies he did not know how to read music, but once he heard a melody he could reproduce it from memory, adding many arabesques in the Tzigan manner. One of his most effective performances was to imitate and even parody the performances of virtuosi who visited Vienna and Budapest. After they had finished playing a long concerto or sonata he would seize his fiddle and with a roguish smile would reproduce most of what he had heard, but he would exaggerate the mannerisms of the artist and add in the roulades and flourishes of the Gypsy race and transform the music in accordance with his own temperament," Magyari Imre's description of Bihari's performance made me think of Carolan, the old harper of eighteenth-century Ireland, who improvised his concerto in the style of Corelli and Geminiani. One of the principal characteristics of the folk musician all over Europe seems to have been the power of imitating whatever he heard. But Bihari possessed many other qualities of originality and his audiences would excite him by applause to show them off. In the evenings in the country when the pine torches were lit and the dancers had congregated under the trees, Bihari would gravely advance into the centre, followed by his small band of string-players with one cimbalom. The dancers would clap their hands and stamp their feet for him to begin playing the *csárdás*, but he would first of all play *lassu* after *lassu* before he launched them off into the fury of the *friss*. Liszt tells us that Beethoven was so inspired by a melody he heard Bihari play in his improvising, that he introduced it into

his overture to King Stephen. What Magyari admired specially in Bihari was his splendid arrogance, for was it not right that a national bard should be arrogant? A bard in the olden days was the noblest of the noblest and he dressed in golden raiment, for his voice was golden and the gods spread their message through its honeyed tones. Bihari spoke to the emperor as an equal. One day his majesty asked him to choose what he would like, thinking that he would select some gift for himself, but Bihari proudly replied that his majesty should grant him and his entire band the patents of nobility! Like so many Gypsy performers he was a Don Juan and he exercised all his powers of fascination when playing, in order to capture the heart of some lady in the audience. He would single out a woman's face in the hall and fix his gaze upon the girl as he played his passionate lament. In Vienna many society ladies succumbed to that hypnotic eye and sent him *billets doux*. "That custom of playing to a lady's face," said Magyari Imre, "has descended to our day and that is the way the Gypsy in the café wins his way into the lady's heart and into her cavalier's pocket!" On one occasion Bihari, when playing at the court of Marie Louise in 1814, played so earnestly to the expression on the face of one of the young Princesses that the empress noticed it and asked him whether he was married. When he assured her in the affirmative the queen invited him to bring his wife to Court dressed in the Gypsy costume. When the empress saw his wife she said to him: "In comparison with such a beautiful Gypsy the charms of young princesses are but small." The young princess, it is said, was so touched by his admiration of her that she sent for him privately and presented him with a gold medal.

When Magyari Imre mentioned Bihari he coupled his name with that of Czermak, the sad Magyar noble who, on account of an unlucky love affair, turned Gypsy and wandered about the country playing his fiddle. "It is good to remember in these unromantic days the story of Czermak, a man born to a position of wealth and

power, who voluntarily chose the life of a vagabond. It is said that it was after hearing Bihari play that Czermak took an oath that he would never play any other music except Hungarian. This was a characteristic oath to take in Hungary where among the peasant at any rate no other music is allowed." Bihari was a rubicund and jovial figure : he and his band wore a gorgeous uniform of blue with gold braid. Czermak, on the other hand, wandered through the forest dressed in rags, associating with brigands and outlaws as well as Tzigans. Peasants at night would hear a knock at their doors and would rise up in terror thinking it was some evil spirit, perhaps Mashmurdálo, the giant of the woods. But no, it was the gaunt, wild-eyed Czermak with his fiddle who craved a night's lodging. Even to-day on the Puszta in such villages as Hajdunánás and Hajduszoboszló I have heard Gypsies talk of Czermak's exploits. It is said that he became a wanderer because a young girl rejected his love, but we should remember that those were the days of Werther. I prefer to think that Czermak, who was filled with the *mal de siècle*, loved the life of wandering through the woods and open plains surrounded by the picturesque vagabonds. At night in the distance he would see the fires around Lake Balaton and when he came near the brown tents he would find a dozen waggons with their horses drawn up. Beneath the trees skins were spread out and at the back on planks were the orchestra. The old women sat round in a ring with the little children. Inside the young girls with tambourines in their hands danced to the rhythm of the orchestra while the men cracked the joints of their fingers to imitate the sound of castanets. When Czermak arrived, all would rise to welcome him, for he was welcomed as a *Pral* or brother by the Gypsies. With them he would roam and when he had any money he would share it among them and he would drown his sorrow in *pálinka* or brandy. Many noble families tried to rescue him from the vagabond life, but he would suddenly disappear and wander about with naked feet and in rags. Liszt des-

cribes how once Count Francis Deszöfi was engaged in celebrating a religious ceremony in the church on his estate. Suddenly in the middle of the ceremony a pale, gaunt figure in rags walked quickly up the aisle, seized the violin from the leader of the band and played like a man in a trance. All were spellbound by the playing which was divine in its sweetness. When he had finished all demanded the name of the wanderer and he replied proudly: "Czermak." It is curious to note the contrast between Bihari and Czermak: the former an untutored Gypsy sprung from vagabond stock, playing to audiences of kings and emperors, arrayed in braid uniform: the latter sprung from the nobility and educated in music, casting everything away in the effort to arrive back at the state of nature. Bihari and Czermak might be taken as the double symbol of the vagabond fiddler—two sides of the same picture. Magyari Imre played pieces by each of them in turn. The music of Bihari in construction resembles the works of the violin composers of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, but on a small scale. There is plenty of sensuous melody and a profusion of runs, trills and double stops. Bihari must have heard Paganini and tried to copy his style in such a passage as the following:



The melodies and dances are short and there is hardly any development from a musical point of view, for the violinist would repeat them again and again and trust to his momentary inspiration for the improvised flourishes. At times the style seems to be a parody of

the music of that period, as for instance in the following passage :



Both Bihari and Czermak, however, let themselves go when they came to the *csárdás* : no matter how highbrow they tried to become in their serious works, they would always end up their piece with the traditional dance as in the following example by Czermak :



. After hearing Magyari Imre play Bihari and Czermak, I asked him to play something by Czinka Panna, friend of Rákoczi, national hero, and the greatest woman Gypsy who ever lived in Hungary. Among the Gypsies in the country the name of Czinka Panna is one to conjure with, as I found in my rambles. Whenever I wanted to awaken friendly thoughts in wandering fiddlers on the road I would play the famous tune of Czinka Panna and listen to them sing words in Romany to it. The melody seems to possess a special significance for the Gypsies, and an old man once told me that it is a magic tune :



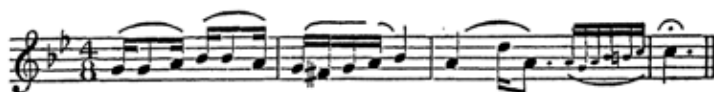
Czinka Panna is a mythical character in Hungary, and she should be cherished by women violinists the world over as the first woman to win national fame as a minstrel at a time when few of her sex won renown with that instrument. We hear of Czinka Panna in 1725 as a wonder-girl among the Magyar folk. At the age of fourteen she was already famous, and she wandered

from village to village with bands of Gypsies who would perch her up on a table in the inns to play for the company the stirring Rákoczi march tune composed for the hero by her grandfather, Michael Barna. "A queer little thing she must have been," said Magyari, "and they say she was very dark in complexion, being a true daughter of Egypt, and her raven black hair would fall over the violin when she played. With her bow she struck sparks from the fiddle, I tell you, and she thrilled everyone by the vigour of her style." It was not only her playing that won her renown in Hungary but her character. She had married before she was fifteen and became a model wife among the Gypsies. Her house was always clean and her children so neatly dressed that her virtues became proverbial among the Romanies, who are not noted for their cleanliness. The baron of the district of Gömör where she came from was so struck by her sterling worth that he built a little house by the River Szabajo for her to live in with her family. And there she did live in complete happiness but only when the snow was on the ground and the wind blew across the plain. In the summer when she saw the brown tents of the tribes in the distance she would leave her family and roam with the bands, playing in the villages, for she was always a vagabond at heart and no thought of husband or children was strong enough to stifle the passionate call of music in the wilds that welled up in her heart. After her death verses were composed by the Gypsies in her honour and were sung in Hungarian and in Latin.

Neither Bihari nor Czermak possessed her originality and the few tunes that have come down to us are masterpieces. She was a wistful little thing and for ever lamenting the passing of those glorious summer days when the Gypsies might rove at will over the broad expanses without a care in the world, with God to feed them as He does the birds of the air. One of her melodies called "*Cserebogár, sárga cserebogár*," tells the story of the merry cockchafer in the summer heat flitting about joyfully as though his life would never turn to woe. Little does



he think of the pitiless winter that will descend upon the earth and change all his happiness to sorrow :



"Cockchafer, yellow cockchafer, I do not ask when summer shall come, nor how long my life shall last ; I only ask when I shall be my love's."

The power of those melodies, as Magyari Imre explained to me, is magical. The Gypsies have from early childhood learnt to associate them with their race and tradition. Among certain nomad tribes I met with in Hungary music is even used for healing the sick and relieving from pain. According to the Gypsy belief, all illness and pain is caused by malignant spirits that lie in wait for the unwary, and the duty of the shaman or wizard is to drive them away. Music is one of the most potent charms in Gypsy lore just as it is among the Arabs, who hold that a note of music when once it has been played does not fade away but is stored in the air ready to return one day. Melodies, according to the Gypsies, may bring storms or sunshine : they may cause sickness or bring back health. It is a terrifying thought, for who knows but that we are surrounded by the hymns of hate of those who preceded us ? Thus the tune of Czinka Panna to the Gypsy mind confers on those who hear it certain virtues associated with that minstrel woman whom they reverence. Ferencz Liszt tells an interesting story of the magical power of music which is characteristic of the Gypsy point of view, and it comes from India, the original home of the Gypsies. Once upon a time there was a young Indian princess who was in love with a young musician possessing many magic melodies, including one that could consume with fire the person who sang it. The princess was in love with him, but she longed in her heart to hear the wonderful tune that could consume with fire and she begged the young man to satisfy her curiosity. At last he gave in to her wish.

It was a moonlight night and they were both walking on the banks of the Ganges. The musician took his harp and descended into the river, and as he played the waters began to rise. As the beautiful voice floated through the air the waters began to rise higher and higher, above his waist, then up to his neck, and still he sang in tones that were becoming ever softer and softer. At last the waters closed above his head, and all that the maiden saw was a bluish flame which flitted for awhile over the waters.

To civilized people music has lost a great deal of its magical fire and we listen unmoved, for our pleasure becomes intellectual as we analyse the structure of the piece as though it were a piece of architecture. But to the primitive Gypsy mind music is much stranger. When a wandering minstrel plays a dance tune he associates it with stories, legends and ballads, and as he plays he sees before his inner eye a picture. I have heard Gypsies weave fantastic stories around certain melodies as if music irresistibly called up in their mind forms and pictures. The essence of the Gypsy art is to stimulate through the wild, untamed nomadic spirit which the race has preserved down the ages. The wild nomadic personality of the Gypsy enables him to penetrate more easily to the heart of the nations wherein he has made his home. Between the Magyar race from the central plateau of Asia and the Romany from India there are certain affinities, and thus the two races react mutually upon one another. The Magyar nature needs the Gypsy to stimulate his senses at certain periods and raise him to a pitch of intoxication, but we should remember that wine, lights, perfumes play their part as well as music in the Hungarian orgy. Music is by far the most important of the elements because it is the most suggestive, and I remember a Magyar peasant saying to me: "Give a Magyar a glass of water and a Gypsy, and you'll see him become completely drunk."

While these thoughts were passing through my mind Magyar Imre was away at the other end of the verandah

playing to the face of a lady who was sitting alone. Each time that he began a fresh tune she would take a rose out of a bundle of flowers that lay beside her and throw it to him. The waiters were evidently in awe of her, for they hastened to her side every few minutes with liqueurs which she would toss off with an arrogant gesture. She was a decidedly pretty girl with auburn hair, pale waxen complexion and green eyes. Her face was virginal and innocent, but her violent red dress and her carmine lips gave her the appearance of a maiden turned vampire. Magyari Imre stood by her table and played to her for a long time. The girl then started to sing in a soft voice that echoed through the moonlit garden and held the people spellbound. Her singing was the essence of Magyar folk-lore: it had a desolate sadness, a sense of restless, unsatisfied seeking as she passed from one melody to another, always followed by Magyari Imre and his band. Her voice was like a dazzling bird of paradise winging its way in the clear air, and when weariness would descend and her wings would refuse to bear her up, then the violin and the cimbalom would revive her spirit and help her to soar again. All around them was ghostly silence and the sounds of the city faded away into the distance. The heavy scents of the trees mounted to us from the garden that stretched down to the Danube, and through the leaves the moon worked fantastic patterns. Such is the final memory that remains with me of my meeting with Magyari Imre, the Gypsy Violin King, under the trees on that moonlit night on Margaret's Island.

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Hungarian Idiom in Music*

#### ADVENTURES WITH TUNES

MY experiences in Budapest were a godsend to me as a vagabond fiddler, for in the cafés I heard the greatest Gypsies of Hungary play the national melodies and dances, and in my own playing I tried as far as possible to copy their style. In Hungary it is not enough for the village minstrel to play the folk-tunes: he must interpret them in such a way that they work their spell, and he must embroider them and improvise.

One of my most difficult tasks was to cultivate the strong rhythmical accentuation of the Hungarian style so alien to the spirit of northern nations. Whenever I played in the villages I felt it necessary to whip my Anglo-Celtic nature up to the pitch of orgy in order to satisfy the peasant audience.

My Gypsy friends seemed to be able to produce the orgiastic spirit in the people with very little trouble: they would stand at the table of some peasant like statues, but their sardonic eye like that of a wizard would know at a glance what mood the peasant was in, and they would tune their fiddles to that mood. As for me, I struggled along, perspiring and wearing myself out in the attempt to rouse the men to song. At first I wandered in a musical maze without any clear, logical ideas concerning the huge mass of Hungarian folk-music. I would play tunes at random without realizing that the most important task of a minstrel was to choose his tunes carefully according to a preconceived plan, for every one of them possesses very definite meanings and where one tune will make the men yawn or the women titter, another will draw

them all to their feet in an outburst of triumphant *mulatni*. Then gradually a certain order came into my chaotic mind and I began to divide up the Hungarian folk-tunes into groups and I would build up my rhapsodies following a logical order.

A rhapsody means, according to its Greek origin, a sewing together of songs, and the minstrel must sew them together so that the emotional excitement of his audience grows in intensity as the piece progresses. Rhapsodies always start with slow, sad music, meandering on in endless melancholy, for the Magyar enjoys himself in weeping and the first approach to his soul may only be made through those melodies which call up in his mind visions of tragic battles long ago. The *lassu* of the rhapsody is a slow melody full of restless notes followed by long pauses :

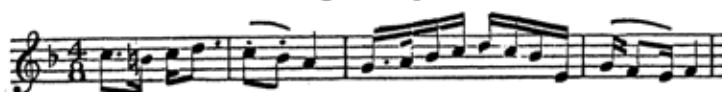


The restless phrase is repeated again and again monotonously and the long pauses lull our senses. I always compared it to the singing of a lonely nomad in the desert : he cries out his song to the void and then pauses to hear the echo. After hearing many of those melodies constructed on the same principles I found it possible to improvise others with similar restless bow strokes, followed by long pauses and the repetition of the melody a fifth higher. A great many slow Hungarian melodies are formed in this pattern which must be a very ancient

one, for we find the following in Mátray's collection under the date 1553-1554 :



When I had played the *lassu* over and over again my Gypsy friend who was accompanying me on the cimbalom would suddenly wink at me and strike a major chord. Then the rhythm would become more martial and strict in tempo. At this point of the rhapsody it is customary to use a sharply accentuated rhythm with a snap in it—the kind of snap we get in the Scotch song “Comin’ thro’ the rye” ! This rhythm occurs so frequently in the Hungarian music that we must consider it a fundamental part of the Magyar idiom. The Gypsies revel in it and beat it out triumphantly on their fiddles. According to Fox Strangways, the rhythm is the same as one found frequently in Indian music. The following example is a characteristic one and taken from a melody which I have heard sung to improvised words :



This rhythm, which is nearly always in  $\frac{4}{8}$ , in its leaps and bounds often resembles the Asclepiad in Latin verse.

If the dominant emotion of the first part of the rhapsody, the *lassu*, is full of languid melancholy and despair, and that of the second part or *friss* is martial vigour, the third and final part, the *csárdás*, is the orgy. In my experience of playing in the village cafés and the fairs

I found that all success depended on the *csárdás*. No matter how poetical and how rhythmic my playing might have been in the beginning of the rhapsody, all went for nought if my powers of resistance were not sufficient for the vertiginous dance. In a café where there was a good cimbalom player I had little difficulty, for he would support my faltering bow, but out in the country where the people danced around the solitary fiddler one needed the force and concentration of a Hercules to play the following tune until the whole audience became galvanized into mad rhythm :



As a relief from the fast rhythms of the *csárdás* the Gypsies taught me various melodies that they called "bird songs." One of the most famous is always associated with the name of Reményi, the celebrated Gypsy violinist who played the Hungarian army into battle in the war of liberation of 1848 :



Every Gypsy prides himself on his playing of those bird songs, for it enables him to show off all his powers of florid ornamentation. Grace-notes, trills and flourishes become as much of an obsession with him as the arabesque did with the architects of the Alhambra. The Tzigan is unable to play a single melody without festooning it with ornaments and thus he shows his Eastern origin, for Indian music is full of such embellishments.

In my attempt to assimilate the Gypsy style of per-

formance I cast away as much of the good old classical violin tradition as I could, for I remembered how Liszt had said that there is no rule or discipline in Gypsy music. Everything is allowed provided it pleases the audience, for Gypsy art is not a science but a mystic song. There must be no attempt to modulate, for the Tzigan likes to spring suddenly to a remote key just as in his conversation he leaps from one question to its direct opposite. When playing in the minor key it was necessary to adopt the augmented fourth, diminished sixth and augmented seventh. After some weeks of ceaseless training I acquired the Gypsy idiom, and I was proud of myself, for I began to know how to read the faces of my audience: I could go up to the table and play to the dark eyes of some Magyar girl and make her sing to my playing, and I also acquired the sardonic and yet fawning air of one who knows how to play his way into her cavalier's pocket.

Then one day my pride came tottering down like a house of cards.

I became acquainted with a young musician of Budapest, a highbrow who detested the very name of Gypsy, and who was determined to correct me of my bias in favour of the Romany race. It was useless for me to quote Liszt's panegyrics at him, for he was a devotee of Béla Bartók, Kodály, and the new music of Hungary. Liszt and Brahms, he told me, did a great harm to Hungary by their so-called rhapsodies and Hungarian dances. The success of those hybrid works seventy years ago did, it is true, turn the thoughts of Europe towards Hungarian art, but it was the art of a foreign race in Hungary. Liszt intended his book on Gypsies to be the prologue to the rhapsodies which were the separate cantos of a gigantic Gypsy epic in music, but he made the mistake of calling the Gypsy music Hungarian, as though it was the wandering Indian race created all the Magyar music. According to his theory, the Gypsies brought their scale as well as their language from the East into Hungary, and the Magyars adapted their national dances to the Gypsy airs and sang melodies of Gypsy origin to Hungarian words



which have remained until to-day in the villages of the countries.

All critics from Bartalus and Brassai down to Béla Bartók and Kodály have refuted Liszt indignantly. The title of the book of Liszt should have been "The Gypsies and the manner they handle music in Hungary." They have never been creators, but they have perpetuated the music of the peasant and the city-man, owing to their position as minstrels. "And I would say, a plague on them for their perpetuation," said the young musician from Budapest. What have they done save deform those old melodies handed down from father to son? Nowadays it is only with the greatest difficulty that the folklore expert can separate the commonplace art-music of the town amateur from the genuine peasant music.

When I played the melodies and dances I had learnt the young musician would adopt a critical air. He was most polite and he had the ineffable courteous tact of the Budapestian, but he would sniff when I used in my playing plenty of rubato and Gypsy harmonies. In the end he sat down at a piano and made me play Vivaldi Concertos and Corelli Sonatas, and when he had played several hours he said: "Now you have opened wide the windows and the stink of that Gypsy art has disappeared." A few days later he took me to hear the well-known violinist Szigeti play a programme which included works by Béla Bartók. The playing of Szigeti was the complete explanation in music of all that the young musician had told me. Szigeti was the anti-thesis to the Gypsy in his playing: cold, statuesque, perfect, he fascinated me by his sculptural qualities. Music for him was architecture, and emotion was subordinated to design. There was fire in his playing, but it was a fire well slacked down and never allowed to blaze out into a raging furnace. Occasionally his refined art would become more rugged and primitive. In Bartók's second sonata there was something barbaric about his playing, and the strange melodies resembled the fantastic improvisations on flutes by shepherds. The violin

revelled in arabesques, but they were more primitive than the Gypsy ones, as though the basis of the music was a primæval rhapsody of the Magyar race before the invasion of the Gypsies. The varying rhythms, too, gave the same impression of Oriental primitiveness, but without a trace of the usual monotony.

Another evening I went with my friend to hear the "Psalmus Hungaricus" of Kodály, one of the great works of modern Magyar music. The solo tenor takes the part of the prophet who sees in his mystical visions the sorrows and distress of Hungary, the land that must breed heroes of unflinching courage if she is to survive her sad destiny. The chorus symbolizing the people answers the voice of the prophet and cries out at one moment its despair, at another its triumphal joy and hope in the future. In Kodály there is less variety of rhythm, less subtlety and contrast than in Bartók, but there is more of the epic spirit and more musical imagination. In both of them we may admire an art which stretches down to the roots of their race.

As Jean Cocteau said, "plus un poète chante dans son arbre généalogique, plus il chante juste." Bartók and Kodály have given a wonderful example to Europe by their researches into Hungarian folk-song. In the days of Erkel and Liszt the music of the country was outwardly Magyar, but only in the sense that Tchaikowsky's style is Russian. It was necessary to penetrate to the soul of the race, and it was left to these two modern composers to undertake the task. They shunned the cities and wandered through the countryside visiting the cottages of the peasants and the huts of the shepherds. There they found an amazing wealth of traditional songs and ballads describing the life of a people through centuries, and in discovering this treasure they saw pass before their eyes the panorama of Hungarian history. Béla Bartók in his journeys among the people carried a phonograph with which he recorded the singing and playing of the peasants. From the plain of Hungary he passed into Transylvania and from there to Roumania, record-

ing all that he heard in the villages, and he deposited the disks in the Ethnographical Section of the National Hungarian Museum at Budapest. All his efforts were directed towards separating popular art music, or the music of more or less cultivated amateurs from peasant music. Among the peasants there exists a primitive musical style, but it is liable to disappear because they are in constant contact with more cultured classes, such as, for instance, the town-dwellers, and also with the peasantry and upper classes of the neighbouring countries.

Two opposite tendencies assert themselves among peasants: one is to preserve old traditions unaltered, and the other is to imitate novelties. When the imitative tendency becomes stronger than the conservative instinct the peasant gets hold of many cultural products of those classes; but as peasant life is secluded those foreign, borrowed elements become transformed, and finally thoroughly assimilated into the music of the race. Bartók therefore divides his collection into two parts consisting of the old style and the new style of Hungarian peasant music.

The old style, which is becoming very rare, is confined to elderly people who can only be persuaded with great difficulty to sing because they know that their young relations deride all that is old-fashioned. Their songs are mostly sung in the semitoneless pentatonic scale: *g, b flat, c, d, f*, and in the performance each line of the text is often introduced with an interjection consisting of one syllable such as *hey* or *ey*. This interjection is to give a flying start for the principal accent which in Hungarian verse always falls on the first syllable of the line.

The new-style tunes differ from the old-style tunes through their structure, which is more architectural and less primitive. Every boy and girl in the villages sings these tunes, and they are sung in unison by the men working in the fields or by soldiers on the march. Whereas the old-style peasant music was more individual the new-style is more collective and expresses more

completely the life of a community. The Hungarian peasant in his singing uses only chest-notes, and Béla Bartók says it is a sign that a singer has been influenced by town life if he uses head-notes. Another characteristic of Hungarian peasant tunes is the very large compass. The Hungarian has a greater range of voice than most other races, and in consequence he does not select a suitable pitch with much care, contenting himself with simplifying difficulties whenever they occur.

The researches of Bartók and Kodály on the folk-music of their country have been a great boon to music in Europe for they have pointed the way that young composers may tread. Bartók and Kodály did not follow the example of so many folk-lore experts and content themselves with locking up their tunes in a glass case as specimens of antiquarian interest. They moulded their own style upon them and wrote music which though not actually folk-song yet took its sinews from folk-song. They have thus carried on further the process of nationalism in music. From hearing their music and studying many of their records I came to the conclusion that there might be danger in pursuing the Bartók-Kodály example too far. Bartók and Kodály are not chauvinistic, but many of the younger musicians are. My young Budapestian friend, for instance, would not listen to the rhapsodies of Liszt or the dances of Brahms because they were not genuine Magyar music. He had a hatred for the nineteenth century which was a mania. At times I heard him even say that he would like to destroy all the music of the world from 1750 up to 1900. "We have been surfeited with romanticism," he would cry: "Beethoven's grim frown, Schumann's sentimentality, Brahms' pompousness have destroyed the pure outline of an art that was dying when Mozart was born. Over the nineteenth century the spirit of Wagner stretches like a pall stifling not only music, but all the arts. Nietzsche was right to attack him, but he was no musician and that was why he glorified Bizet's *Carmen* with the refrain of the Parisian boulevards. Thank God the moderns are working in the right direction and creating a music from the soil of their

own country." I was becoming wearied of the heresies of my friend, and I could not help answering him : " You are suffering from the modern *cénacle* spirit and you are terrified of the obvious. You hate the great figures of the nineteenth century because they trumpeted out a message for all humanity whereas your gods only pipe for the few. Beethoven and Wagner were not narrowly national and they welcomed everyone into their fold. Even Liszt that you decry was the worthy henchman of Wagner, one of the most generous artists who ever lived, because he broke down the narrow bonds of nationality and welcomed all European artists. You disdain the Gypsies because they are the foreigners in your country, though they have lived there for five hundred years and have brought to your music their strange, exotic personality, making themselves part of the great pageant of the world. You disdain them for deforming your music, but you forget that for centuries they preserved it from total extinction. 'The Lord will provide' is the motto of the Gypsies, and their retentive ear caught any tune they heard in their wanderings over the Puszta, whether it was the song of the shepherd, the scullery-maid, or the lord in his castle, and they transformed it into a strange wild music by the magic of their self-taught art. They have been the minstrels of your country, spreading music among the masses of the people, but you of the narrow *cénacle* produce works which are caviare to the multitude. No, sir : narrow nationalism in politics has created post-War Europe, with its absurd tariff walls, its customs barriers, its passport visas, its meddlesome police and spy-systems, but narrow nationalism in music is a still greater disaster, for it will end by killing the spirit of music which brought harmony into the discordant world of the Tower of Babel. Music is the only true international language, and there must be no barriers. And that is why you must listen with pleasure to me, an Irish Gypsy, playing your melodies in my own way, adding in my own colours, my own ornaments, my own individual interpretation. The spirit of music is great enough to include all of us, whether scholars, composers, clowns or vagabond minstrels."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Day of Saint Stephen*

#### PAGEANTRY IN BUDAPEST

**B**UDAPEST to-day is a feast of colour, for the spirit of Saint Stephen, the first great King of Hungary, has descended among his people. Though he lived away back in the year 1000 he is still the symbol of the Magyar destiny. On this day all our thoughts are centred in Buda, the royal and noble section of the capital, for on the hill above the Danube stands the Coronation Chapel where the holy function is held.

Early in the morning I wended my way from Pest across the Danube and up the narrow streets of Buda, where the ancient houses seem to slumber sadly in a world that has forgotten past glories. They are all low houses, with windows barricaded as though every neighbour was an arrant enemy. The doors and gateways, though, relieved the gloom by their baroque ornamentation, dating from the century of the rococo in art. Buda is a colourful city and to-day, though the clouds are sombre, the population dash one tint after another before our eyes. Every street is crowded to the limit, for this is not simply a feast for the folk of Budapest: from miles around in the country the peasants have come dressed up in their picturesque national costumes. Here and there I see embroidered tunics, red and white, huge baggy white trousers, giving their wearers the look of petticoated men, black hats with flourishing cockade. Through the streets on all sides is the ceaseless murmur of excited conversation. As the procession begins to appear in the distance there is a moment of tense silence, for everyone is devouring the approaching hosts with his eyes. In the silence there resounds out a sound of church bells, but in the distance, ringing slowly and with measured beat as though to give time to the procession. In a few

seconds other bells nearer respond to the first, and soon the air is quivering with sound. Every type of bell seems to mingle its sound with the reverberating harmony : at one moment sharp, strident bells of brass : at another, deep-throated bells of bronze. Some bells chatter, others boom, some ring quickly, others swing in majestic cadence. After the symphony of the bells the military band joins the fray and the trumpets awaken the echoes from the slumbering houses. Then all of a sudden a flight of doves is loosed and the white cloud wings its way aloft, quivering as though the birds were the materialization of the reverberating sound. The music played by the band is solemn and heartrending in its sadness : it is a Magyar folk-song, and to-day seems more poignant because it makes us all think of the provinces that disappeared from the Kingdom.

Soon we hear the rhythmic cadence of the marching soldiery, wearing helmets and carrying banners. After them comes a long line of priests and monks, some in white habits with black cloaks, followed by nuns veiled in black. They are the austere part of the procession to prepare us for the picturesque band that is to follow.

Now we are back in the ancestral Hungary, with its dukes and duchesses in gorgeous robes. Every colour of the rainbow is there, and the sun that had refused to grace the festivities up to this now shines upon the vestments of the Magyar nobles—gold and silver, red, green, yellow, lilac pass before our eyes. Helmets glitter, swords flash as the descendants of ancient Hungary advance in a cloud of plumes and banners.

In that procession not one of those people is self-conscious or timid : everyone walks slowly and proudly as though he carried in his hand the household gods of Hungary. A lady passes alone in front of a group ; she is pale complexioned and has glittering golden hair. She wears a coronet on her head and from it flows a veil of cloth of gold. Her dress was black but ornamented with gold lace. With her was a beautiful young girl dressed in the tight bodice and short skirt of the Hungarian woman. After the great ladies and their gorgeous cavaliers came the clergy, and

amongst them I saw the Cardinal of Hungary resplendent in purple. That morning he had gone to the chapel in the Royal Palace to fetch the Royal relic which must be carried in the procession. Inside the chiselled gold monstrance lies the black, mummified hand of Hungary's first great King and saint—that hand which pacified the warring elements and gave laws to the followers of Arpád. The hand of Saint Stephen and his crown are both preserved in the crypt of the Royal palace, objects of such veneration to the Hungarians that even the Bolsheviks when they attacked the country after the War respected them. As the hand approaches in the gorgeous casket amid the sound of church bells, the music seems to swell ever louder to a crescendo and then as it departs the sound diminishes, suggesting to my mind thoughts of Wagner's Grail prelude to Lohengrin.

Surrounding the casket are the Halberdiers of the Crown dressed in doublets of dark green embroidered with silver, red breeches, high Hungarian boots. They carry large swords, and on their heads they wear green and silver caps, with feathers as crests, which give them the look of *Arabian Nights* heroes. Over their uniform they wear long white cloaks with scarlet folds. So gorgeous are they that the Knights of Malta, all in red, who surround the Cardinal are eclipsed. After the clerics come the governors of the state: Regent Horthy, the ruler of Hungary, dressed in an admiral's uniform, which reminds us that he commanded the Austro-Hungarian Navy in the War, and the proud Archduke Joseph, with his son, two of the few survivors of the ill-fated House of Hapsburg. As he passes a murmur goes up from the crowd of citizens that surround me. They feel affection for the old man who is known as the "Hungarian Archduke," but they say under the breath, "No more Hapsburgs for Hungary."

As the procession of nobles and ladies fair drags its slow length along it is interesting to listen to the commentaries of the spectators. The Hungarians are a race of pageant lovers, and their enthusiasm would make one believe that they are not democratic in the modern sense. They are still monarchical—and even in the case of Horthy they



call him Regent as though any day it might be possible to place upon his brow the crown of King Stephen. To me the whole spectacle was one of unutterable sadness : it was like digging up the ashes of the past. I began to associate the scene in my mind with fairy stories of my youth by Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy, with their visions of sweet-faced queens and noble cavaliers—the stories that were told to amuse little Dauphins living in the lonely luxury of Versailles. Before the War there was still the glamour of pageantry in Europe, but now it is all dead. The world will never go back to those days of monarchy and pageantry again, for we are delivered over to an era of enlightened civilization, typified by American efficiency. Behind me in the crowd was a group of Americans from the Middle West and their comments sounded the knell deep within me.

First American (a clean-shaven, active man of fifty, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and focusing a film camera) : “This is all very pretty, but I call it childish. One has to come to Europe to see such childishness in a people. No wonder they are in a mess.”

Second American : “If they only gave up all those gewgaws and finery and invested in good hotels and gasoline stations this country would go ahead.”

Third American (a lady who has been trying desperately hard to master the intricacies of Magyar history from a guide-book) : “You are both wrong : I think this is a swell procession, and if you were ever as picturesque as those young men in the velvet uniforms we American women would not need to take our thrillers in Europe every year.”

Inside the Coronation Chapel the scene was as grandiose as the last act of *Parsifal*. It was a blaze of gold, with myriads of candles twinkling in every corner through vast clouds of incense. Inside, the Cardinal said High Mass, and outside the church at the top of the steps, on the tiny open space that overlooks the Danube, Mass also was said. Then the Hymn of Hungary was sung by the huge choir, for every member of the crowd feels inspired to song, and

the volume of harmony floats in air over the Danube and loses itself in the distance. The Tricolour flag of Hungary is hoisted and the soldiers present arms, for we are now at the most solemn moment of the service—the Elevation. It was on the very spot where I am standing that the kings of Hungary were crowned, and according to tradition the new monarch would unsheathe his sword and point with it to the four cardinal points, pronouncing four times the oath that he would defend all the boundaries of Hungary against any aggressor.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Life on the Hungarian Plain*

#### MEZÖKÖVESD

FROM Budapest I wended my way to the little country town of Mezökövesd in the plain, which was to be my next base of operations. Ask any Hungarian where the most characteristic customs of the Magyar are to be seen and he will probably say : "Go to Mezökövesd : for there you will see the men and girls wear beautiful embroidered garments, and in the evening you will hear the melancholy *tdrogató* played by love-sick swains out on the Puszta."

My arrival at the village was not so unobtrusive as I could have wished. As I was trudging along the dusty road leading to the town, a ragged victoria, drawn by a horse as lean as Don Quixote's nag, passed me, and the driver, noticing my footsore appearance, invited me to mount. He was a lanky youth, with a great shock of untidy hair, and on the top of it all he wore a curious oil-cloth hat, with large brim. At first he fired one quick sentence after another at me in Magyar, but finding that I did not answer he relapsed into a moody silence.

Mezökövesd is a primitive place—full of thatched cottages that give it the air of an Irish village. The women wear embroidered smocks, but they walk about barefooted, and their voluminous petticoats and their scarf head-dresses give them a grotesque appearance. Many of them look like Dutch peasants who have suddenly taken it into their heads to paint their faces with walnut juice. As we clattered along the road some hurled remarks at my driver and he cracked his whip. At one point the road was all white in the distance as though snow had fallen on the burning earth. But no ! it was a huge herd of geese on their way back from the meadows. Goose-farming is one

of the great industries of a country that in its cooking delights to serve up the delicate livers of those bounteous birds. In another place I came across a herd of pigs, squealing and grunting as they were driven on by their swineherds. In the town my struggles began. My driver wanted to insist that I should go into an imposing building called the "Szleginger" Hotel. He begged and entreated, but I was firm. I had not enough money for such an imposing place, and I saw at the other side of the street a smaller place called "Rákoczi Vendéglő" which was more modest. My driver then started to curse and drove off, leaving me to my fate. I suppose he is paid by the rival hotel as a decoy duck.

After a great deal of bargaining with the curious little proprietor I obtained a room at two pengős, or one shilling and fourpence, which was to be my *pied-à-terre*. Here I could leave my few belongings when I started out to scour the country. In order to reach it I had to pass through two bars, a kitchen, a scullery, a washhouse and a broken-down lavatory. The door of the room was off its hinges and every moment peasant girls came in and chattered to me. One of them was the slatternly maid of all work of the hotel, and she had been scrubbing clothes. Her red petticoat covered a portion of her bare legs and her open smock revealed her breasts. She sat on my bed and pointed to my fiddle. There was nothing for it but to play a *csárdás* for her, and a tall bony wench she was, with the high cheekbones and slanty eyes of the Mongolian type. Her name was Adila, and she was the patient mule-like drudge of the whole establishment. Whenever I groped my way through the dark passages of the hotel I heard the name of Adila shouted on all sides. She was cursed, she was ordered, she was pushed, and always she maintained an air of dignified composure as though she were Patience sculpted on a monument. Sometimes I would hear her mumbling strange words under her breath and her eyes would flash as though her resentment had risen to fever heat. Then she would shake her head sadly and relapse into her animal composure again. Adila was a friend: she would steal

dainties from the kitchen and bring them to me, and we would devour them together, both seated on my bed. She always imagined that I was a penniless adventurer, for one day she saw me looking glum, pulled out a pengö from her purse and gave it to me. I suppose she thought that I was in need of food and her generous Hungarian nature was touched.

In the two bars of the inn there is great commotion in the evening, for the peasants come in to drink, and there are two ragged Gypsies who play the fiddle, each of them in separate parts of the room. They are both tiny little men as dark as Hindoos and very wild-looking. One of them was sitting beside an oldish man with tousled hair and crazy expression. The latter every few minutes seized the fiddle from the Gypsy and sang ludicrous songs at the top of his voice, accompanying himself pizzicato on the fiddle.

Outside, the evening was balmy and the sunset transfigured the squalid houses of the town; on all sides I saw pigs driven by to the sound of horns blown by the swincherds. Every beast seemed to know its place in the serried, grunting throng, and here and there groups dispersed into their stalls for the night. Hungary finds its riches to-day in those hosts of geese and pigs and oxen: the Treaty of Versailles may have taken away 68 per cent. of its ancient territories, but the spirit of the people is not to be crushed thus. Since the War, in little Hungary, agricultural production has increased ten-fold in intensity. Few countries in Europe produce such an amount of beet for sugar, and then there is the wine trade, which has increased of late owing to the fame acquired by the scented Tokay wine. The life in those villages of Hungary is the last relic of feudalism that is fast disappearing from Europe, except in parts of Spain and South Italy. The Hungarian peasant will have none of the new-fangled ideas, for he prefers to remain true to his own tradition of life. On Sundays here you will see him dressed in shirts, embroidered in red and black, with velvet breeches and shiny Hungarian jackboots. If he is engaged to a girl he wears a kind of skirt arrangement, all embroidered too by hand and a

curious top-hat which give him the appearance of a grotesque doll. As for the girl, his fiancée, she is gorgeously arrayed in brocade suiting with rosettes and ribbons in her hair. And she is not afraid to walk about with her arms bare and her bodice tightly drawn over her buxom breast. She will not pay attention to slender hips or curves, for she wears the famous seven petticoats of light colours which undulate as she walks along proudly, as if she were upon the stage. All those village maidens fascinate the stranger by their vigorous and graceful movements. They resemble young untamed lions as they walk about in pairs, holding each other by the hand, for no young man may attend unless he is the accepted suitor. "Do not imagine that yonder laughing girls are an easy prey for you, O Don Juanesque stranger! They are as closely watched by their parents as though they carried the family fortune within that brocade bodice. In the evening, should you meet one of them, she would not bow to you unless you had done the 'thou' ceremony with her. This consists in putting your arm through your girl's as you sit beside her and in drinking both from the same cup. After you have performed that ceremony you must consider yourself engaged to her and she will walk about with you. Otherwise do not tempt the maidens of the village, O stranger, for they will run from you, as a gazelle from the hunter!" I found, however, that a fiddle sounds its way into hearts that otherwise would be adamant. As I walked down the main street in Mezökövesd, I noticed a group of young girls chatting together in a doorway. As soon as they saw me with the fiddle they laughed and beckoned to me. Then one of them made signs that I should play. In a few minutes I was as intimate a friend as though I had performed the "thou" ceremony with every one of them. As I played, some of them, more mischievous than the rest, pinched my backside and threw my cap over my eyes. They laughed and jostled one another and skitted like frolicsome kittens. I began to preen myself and strut about like Chanticleer in the farmyard, proudly conscious of my powers of fascination and my ascendancy over the simple

girl, when suddenly I realized that they looked on me, not as a normal man, but as a grotesque Gypsy, one to provoke mirth and be pinched and kicked like the stupid clown. And to tell the truth, I had very little of the normal human being about me, for I was in rags and I had not shaved or washed for eight days. To them I was the hardy, chronic tramp who enlivens their lives by his pranks before he moves on to the next village. Then a thought of revenge sprang up in my mind. I stopped playing and, taking off my cap, I passed it round gravely for alms. The girls gave me one quick look and darted away laughing.

In the inn life moves with even course. There are various strata of society that must not be confused. First of all there is the inn-keeper himself—a small, podgy man called Gluck. He is a keen business man with an eye to publicity. He is very conscious of his social position, for he has a fat florid wife and two beautiful daughters, who were not born to waste their sweetness on the desert air of the Puszta—oh! no, they were meant to be princesses to grace the castle of some lord. On Sundays, old Gluck would invite them into the coffee-room, and they would trip daintily to the window and sit in state there to watch the passers-by. Old Gluck may soil his hands by trafficking with peasants, beating them down to the last penny at their fairs; he is a hard man, but after all, is it not all for the glory of God and the delectation of those two slender blossoms of girls and that radiant sunflower, his wife? “You know they were not meant to exist in my humble station,” he said to me one day, “and so I keep them away from it as far as I can. Why, sir, they must get married to men of position, and they will, for I have saved up a good dowry for each of them.” Gluck is a hard man and the peasants and Gypsies fear him, but he in his turn is the patient mule to be ridden to earth by those haughty women.

Then after Gluck come the notable *habitués* of the place who congregate there every evening.

They are the big people of the town, clerks, tradesmen, landowners, and they use the big room of the hotel as their

club. Some of them play chess, others listen to Gypsy music, and at one end of the room is a large billiard table. In my dreams I shall always remember that long room, with its dingy advertisements, its bar in the corner, its smell of stale beer, sausages, garlic, fish, cigar smoke, sweat and charcoal. In sound it will crowd upon me as a medley of Gypsy music, punctuated by rattling billiard balls, exclamations, coughs and the sizzling of frying-pans. And amid it all were the habitual cronies.

How I loved those strange old men, in glossy-seated trousers and tan boots, who sat playing chess hour after hour, or else the squireens in their knickers and green sporting-coats. There was one who fascinated me because he looked as if Arpad had made him one of the legendary band. There was a kindly fierceness about him as though you took an eagle and mated it with a dove. I made friends with him very soon because he loved to sing the Magyar songs and he was liberal with his money. "Come on," he would say to the diminutive Gypsy orchestra—*Mulatni*; "come here, you bastards: now play like mad or I'll hit you over the head with your own fiddles." And when the band would start he would dash off a glass of wine and start singing in his rollicking voice. Then he would stride up to the cimbalom player and mimic his flourishes with the felt-padded hammers. With him was a very fat man to whom everyone in the hotel paid deference. I was told that he was the great man of the district. There was something kind and optimistic about his quadruple chin and his Falstaffian paunch. When he saw me sitting forlorn in a corner alone he came up and asked me who I was, where did I come from, what was my nationality. At first I thought he was a Jew, for his nose was curved, but then he told me to my surprise that his name was Gyula Patay de Baji and he came of very old Hungarian nobility. He is a big farmer, chairman of the Electricity Board (for it is he who at his own expense installed electricity here) and Director of the People's Bank (of which he owns 90 per cent. of the shares). He has been seventeen years settled here in this humdrum town, but before that



he had travelled the length and breadth of the world, for he was an impresario attached to singers and players. "Ah, sir!" he said to me, "I am a Midas in this countryside, for every enterprise I engage in turns to gold, but I don't care a fig for it—*je m'en fiche*. What good is it to me to be shut in here for ever when I think of those days when I roamed through America?"

If M. Patay de Baji was the Prospero of the party and the melodious landowner the Ariel, Kovács, the Magyar-turned-American, was the Caliban. A queer fellow, Kovács—Pittsburg grafted on to Mezökövesd. He was born in this town, but he grew up and was educated in the Middle West, but without losing his Hungarian education. In fact, American civilization seemed to have left in him an outer layer that was completely out of harmony with his Magyar nature. From America he had learnt all there was to know about the cinema and the dog track: his English speech was a mass of curious idioms culled from the lips of gangsters, lounge-lizards, snoopers and racketeers, punctuated every now and then with the eternal "son of a bitch." But this American outer personality was not the real Kovács who was born in the plains of Hungary. He had come back from Pittsburg with his invalid father so that the old man might have the consolation of dying in his native town. Kovács enlightened me concerning the lives of the folk at Mezökövesd. At present in the month of July and August the town is not so gay, because the peasants are all away in the fields working at the harvest; but in October, when all the granaries are full, there is a rush back to the town from the Puszta. The rustic streets are so thronged that it is difficult to thread your way through the maze of carts: the cafés are crowded with excited revellers, eager to enjoy the respite from toil. Kovács told me that many a drama breaks out in this little country town, for the people here are of a proud nature and traditional in their point of view. Honour is cherished above all things. If a man loses his honour he commits suicide, for he has no further desire to live. Suicides are thus frequent in these parts of Hungary, and he told me

that when a man who has been respected cheats at cards or becomes a forger, it is the custom for his friends to leave a revolver in his room—a gentle hint that he should blow his brains out. Kovács did not tell me what would happen if the man who found the revolver did not turn it on himself. I can imagine the commotion that would take place if the recipient of the revolver were to send it back in a tidy parcel to his friends with a polite note declining the invitation. It might run as follows :

“ GENTLEMEN,—

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of the nine mm. revolver and to express my gratitude for the kind thought of my friends. I am deeply conscious of the noble motives which prompted you to interest ourselves in the welfare of my soul. I must, however, decline to avail myself of the opportunity which you so delicately offer me. I have always been rather timid where firearms are concerned. Perhaps this may be due to the fact that I am not entirely Magyar in race, for my mother had Gypsy blood, and the Gypsies, as you know, have never been remarkable for their courage. In my opinion the courage required to use a revolver is of the more brutal kind and quite unnatural to me.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

FARKAS LAJOS.”

Such a man would not have a happy life in Hungary, for then he might have to fight a duel. Kovács told me that men in some parts of the country wear gloves for the purpose of duelling. When you want to insult a man and make him challenge, you thrust towards him a glove, or else you smack his face with it. His words made me feel cold inside, and ever afterwards I avoided any men I saw in cafés wearing gloves. I prefer our North European methods of quarrelling. If a man insults you, deliver a short jab to the point of his jaw and put him down for a count of nine. There is not much romance about such fights with fists, but we are spared the agonizing suspense,

the patronizing of the seconds, who are not risking their own lives, and the significant order of "pistols for two and coffee for one."

Among all my friends at the Rákoczi Hotel, I preferred Lajos, the waiter, for he seemed to me to possess every quality of the perfect man, *totus teres atque rotundus*, of Horace. In the first place he was rotund—of the pleasant rotundity of body, face and smile that inspires confidence in the guests at an inn. An inn-keeper should always employ fat, florid waiters to advertise his cooking, and yet the majority of waiters in the world are lean and dyspeptic as though they were the living embodiments of digestive misery. They seem to cry out: "Eat no more: Master hath murdered food!" Lajos was a chubby figure dressed in a white coat and black trousers. Behind his ear he carried a half-smoked cigarette and in his mouth was the everlasting quill toothpick. As he trotted from one table to another, napkin in hand, he would hum or whistle the latest tune. Lajos was the Johannes Fa-totum of our inn: he knew everyone and everything. He told me the names of every inmate and described the to me in two ways. First of all he would give their outer personality in the following way: "That is Mr. Farkas Lajos: he is a prosperous farmer and has so many acres of land and deposits in Mr. Patay's Bank of so many thousand pengős. He is a great friend of the Parish Priest and pays the biggest subscription to the church." Then he would sidle up nearer to me and say confidentially in a lower voice: "There was a great scandal last year: he went down to the Othon Kávéház in the street over there and made an appointment with Maca—you know she is the paid girl of the establishment—and his wife followed him and caught the two of them together. There was the deuce of a row, I tell you: he protested: the girl screamed as the wife beat her with her umbrella: crowds gathered and it was a roaring farce, I tell you." Nothing escaped the notice of Lajos, and every person as described by him had a shadow as well as a real personality. He was all things to all men: to Mr. Patay and his friends he was discreet and respectful.

To me he was roguish, for he considered me a tramp, and his curiosity knew no bounds, when I explained how I had been in London and New York.

If Lajos disappeared, Mr. Gluck, the proprietor, might as well shut up the shutters and abandon the inn, for life could not go on. At one moment he would be waiting at table, at another serving drinks in the bar. At billiards he was unrivalled, and one of his duties was to make up a game with any guest who so desired. His gifts for diplomacy made him size up his opponent and lose gracefully in the interests of the inn. Lajos came from the town of Kaposvár and had secret contempt for the inhabitants of Mezökövesd who to him symbolized the stupid unenlightenment of the peasant. "You should see the people of Kaposvár," he would say, "they are a bright-eyed people: why, even the Tzigans there are no match for them." One evening Kovács, who had plenty of American dollars in his pocket, decided to give me a party. When you give a party in a Hungarian inn, you engage a private room and order wine. Then when the guests arrive and the corks begin to fly, the lean Gypsies creep in and start tuning their fiddles. At first the clatter of talking is deafening, punctuated by loud shouts, but gradually the mellow Tokay begins to set in motion the musical recollections of the guests and they start singing. Kovács had invited all the usual inmates of the hotel and in addition four or five playgirls from other cafés in the town. It was a wild party, for everyone sang at the top of his voice and the Gypsies played until the sweat ran down their faces in streams. As for me, I stood on the table in the middle of the room and tried my best to keep up with the vertiginous music, but in vain, for the Tokay had gone to my head and I floundered about in the maze of rhythm.

## CHAPTER X

### *Dining with a Hungarian Noble*

#### A PLEA FOR THE GRAND SEIGNEUR

**T**O-DAY I had to borrow the toga of respectability, for I was asked to dine by a Magyar Baron—a real Baron with estates who might have strayed out of eighteenth-century romance. He entered my life by one of those curious turns of the wheel of Fortune. I was playing with a Gypsy band from Parad, in the café at Mezökövesd, and I was teaching them several Russian Gypsy melodies and dances which they played with gusto, when a lonely gentleman tapped his glass and called for Lajos, the ubiquitous waiter. Lajos came over to me with a message to say that I was to play the "Red Sarafan"; when we complied with the request, the old gentleman clapped loudly and asked us to drink some wine. He was a very aristocratic-looking old gentleman with long hair that gave him the look of Abbé Liszt in 1880. His nose was aquiline, his forehead full and his eyes as eager as those of a hawk. He made me a pretty speech in perfect French and welcomed me as a stranger. His manners were as courtly as any courtier of the Longhi period, and he certainly had, in the George Meredith sense, "a leg." My mind associated him with all kinds of Hungarian patrons of arts. I thought of Prince Esterházy first of all; and the vision of Haydn composing rose before me. The old gentleman told me that he had his quartet, but he would only play Mozart and he did not care for modern music. "I like music that fits in with my scheme of life in my old house. I like a long hall with plenty of space for the sound to lose itself and I like music that permits us to linger on beauty and enjoy its fragrance. Mozart's music is an echo of the past when men enjoyed the good things of life and took their ease. To-day there is such rush and bustle

that musicians think they must gallop all the time and jolt and harass our ears with discords which make me feel as if I were in the dentist's chair. Everything in life should be in its place, my dear sir : when I am out on the Puszta, no one loves a gallop more than I do on our mettlesome Hungarian horses, but when I enter my drawing-room I want to see beautifully-dressed women working at embroidery or else chattering gaily. What has happened to the urbane manners that used to charm the world? Modern life has killed conversation just as it has killed letter-writing."

Very soon I became close friends with the Baron, and he would call to take me with him when he went in his motor on trips through the country. I was surprised to find him in a car, though it was the old Ford model, but he explained to me that he had relations in Budapest whom he had to visit frequently. One evening he asked me to his house to dine, and when I arrived at the house, which was some miles from Miskolc, I found my Gypsy friends from Parad with their instruments. They had been engaged to play at the dinner. When I at last sat down to table, behind his chair stood the *Primás*, and by the time we were busy eating our *gulyás* he had roused the band to *csárdás*. Whenever the Baron wanted a particular tune, he would hum in his cracked voice and then all of a sudden the band would dash into the tune, improvising harmony and scattering grace notes, trills, staccati as if they were fire-flies on a summer night. Every time the violinist would play a new tune, the old host would enter the lists with his discordant bass voice and he would beat the time with his hand. Then he would rise up and wave his arms in time with the music as it increased in pace.

As I watched his behaviour towards the humble musicians from Parad, I felt the full force of the Magyar noble personality. The Magyar aristocrat is unlike any of us who dwell in Nordic climes : he has no false shame about himself. It is not necessary to remind him that he is a noble, for he is so absolutely convinced of it that he makes no attempt to

persuade you. He knows that the aristocrat is, as Keyserling would say, a distinct sociological species, and that his whole life has been mapped out in accordance with that law. In our semi-democratic society, we are not sure of ourselves and very often we attempt in a shuffling, uncertain way to prop up our sense of dignity. There are more trivial rules of precedence in our *bourgeois* society than in any ancient concourse of nobles invited by my friend the Baron at his estate. At home I have seen the faces of hosts line with perplexity when it was time to troop into dinner. The wife of the town councillor should go in on the arm of Sir Something X, but Lady X would then be offended because her husband is more important than the town councillor. And in all the affairs of life there is the same uncertain attempt to assume a dignity that is not rooted within ourselves.

It is sad to think that countries such as Hungary and Spain are the last bulwarks in this modern standardized world of the *Grand Seigneur* whose charm is due to his sense of his own position and his refusal to compare himself with others. He can thus afford to give reins to his own temperament in a way that none of us would dare. He acts, not because he follows any code of conduct or convention, but because he feels within himself the necessity of that force of action. Whereas we ask ourselves ceaselessly the question: "Am I acting in accordance with the standards expected of us? Should we not lower ourselves in the eyes of others if we allowed our temperament to take the bit between its teeth?"

After some glasses of Tokay and a few *csárdás* the Baron became Dionysiac in his elation. The slow *lassu*, followed by the fast *friss*, alternately slackened and tightened his nature and he let himself go either way. At one moment when relaxed, he would become as languidly melancholic as an Oriental: at other moments he would rouse himself to rigid rhythms and ride roughshod over all obstacles in the surging music. The Magyar songs show the variety of his life since his race descended on the Puszta in hordes from Central Asia: at one moment he charges the enemy,

at another he dashes along on his horse in the excitement of the chase ; at home in his castle he rests with his lady, and the eternal Gypsy, a sardonic Sancho Panza, plays to the expression on his face and rouses him from one emotion to another.

When I questioned the Baron on the variability of the Magyar songs he exclaimed : " Those songs bring tears of sadness into our eyes or make us shout with joy because they speak to us of our history. They tell us of the summer days when the sun beats down with relentless fury on the Puszta, and there is no shade : of the winter days when the land is ice-bound and winds whistle over the snowy steppes. Such were the varying terms of our history. At one moment a peace-loving monarch of enlightened views such as King Stephen or King Ladislaus the Saint, both of them *chevaliers sans peur et sans reproche* in Magyar chivalry, or else King Matthias Corvinus, the soldier and artist. Hardly had those Kings set their seal on great achievements, when the country would be plunged in war so relentless that it looked as though two Genii were presiding over our destinies. The Spirit of Good would work her influence and redeem the country ; next moment the Spirit of Evil would laugh harshly as she laid in ruins all the lofty schemes." The Baron was now deeply immersed in thoughts of his country and the impish little Gypsy *Primds* vainly tried to catch his eye as he played " unbuttoned " tunes such as " Lyuk, Lyuk." He advanced so close to my host that he all but stuck his violin into his face. The Baron at first paid no attention to him, but suddenly he gave him a box on the ears which sent the little fellow spinning on the ground, violin and all, then he continued : " We Hungarians like to dream of the far-off Arpád, the legendary hero who was the symbol of Wisdom. It was he who united the roving bands and made himself Prince over them. The chiefs of the tribe lifted him up on a shield and then poured some drops of their blood into a bronze cup as a pledge to be faithful for ever. Rugged warriors they were, those Arpáds, as they swept on from Asia in unrelenting onslaught ; they were nomads and the life of settled com-



munities was not to their liking. We have always within us the craze for wandering, and when I was young I would leave my father's castle and rove through the whole extent of Hungary, the greater Hungary alas, and live with the peasants on the Puszta, singing with them those songs that are echoes of past wars, when the Turks ravaged our country in their advance on Buda. For me Petöfi is the poet of Hungary—the spirit of the eternal plains where man is free. Out there his soul was like an eagle freed from prison. Ask any peasant in the tiniest hovel about Rákoczi, our national hero, and he will tell you that he is as living to-day as in the year 1707."

As the Baron was speaking I kept thinking of the comparisons between Hungary and England. In the case of the latter the stability of its government lay in the fact that a people aristocratic in tendency and Republican by temperament turned at the right historic moment to the Democratic form of state and the ideal became that everyone should be a gentleman. In Hungary the ideal is not the gentleman, but the Grand Seigneur, which I should like to symbolize by my friend the white-haired Baron living in his castle with his retinue of peasants, who so far from envying his exceptional position are proud of it because he is, as they say, a richer branch of the same tree, and they are all fully conscious that they partake in the nobility as free-born Magyars.

It is for this reason that I never noticed a trace of servile obeisance given to the Baron's family by any of the workers on his estate. Their attitude was one of equality, and more than once I saw him drinking with them in the same inn. All the time I was with him I was irresistibly reminded of Spain, where the peasant stood in the same relation to the lord of the Manor and both possessed the characteristic of true *Nobleza*. I could not help praying that the day may come in Europe when Democracy is thrown back on itself and its devotees will create a society not on the level of a "lower" but on that of an "upper class." When that day comes Society will resemble a tree all of whose branches draw the same sap from the roots, and blossom out in the

same flowers. Such would be the ideal of my Baron who lives his lonely life on his estate, devoting himself to agriculture—a statuesque old man, symbol of an older generation that has all but disappeared from the world.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Life in a Village Circus*

#### MY ARAB FAKIR FRIEND

**T**O-DAY there has been great excitement in Mezökövesd, for a circus has arrived. Early in the morning I heard the rumble of caravans and the beating of drums in the distance, and through the clouds of dust I saw a motley collection of people, some on horseback, others on foot, some leading bears, others clinging on to the assortment of carts that followed the three lumbering houses on wheels that contained the main troupe. Let no reader imagine that this was the famous Ringley or Floto circus with their droves of animals and their battalions of artists : no : this was one of those poor dishevelled circuses that wander about the country brightening the lives of humble folk. Alas, soon will come the day when there will be no more circuses in the country towns, for every street will have its wretched cinema theatre and the antics of the clown will be forgotten. That will be a sad day, for how can we imagine the life of a child without Harlequin, Columbine or Mr. Punch ? They symbolize the eternal comedy of life from the days of Aristophanes to Gilbert and Sullivan. The clowns of the circus are the noblest lesson that could be taught to innocent, unspoiled humanity. Look at Harlequin and Brighella, the stupid and the clever clown. Tradition states that they came originally from the city of Bergamo in North Italy, where there is a lower and an upper city. The upper-city inhabitants living on top of a hill were the quickest witted and they looked down on the dwellers in the lower city who had duller and coarser intelligences. And so in every farce, just as in life, there is the clever schemer who deceives his duller brother. Just as in the old play all the plot centred on those two characters, so too in modern life.

And the circus with its clowns and dare-devil acrobats does not limit its moral teaching to the comedy of human life. The circus acrobat is an artist whose instrument is his body, and his somersaults and pirouettes and mortal leaps are all the result of technique acquired by sacrifice and self-denial.

A circus clown should be called an artist in the same way that we call a great musical performer an artist. Watch Grock, the Hungarian, the greatest clown in Europe, and you will see a performance worthy of Kreisler or Cortot. Its perfection consists in its marvellous suggestion and preparation. Grock, like the great actor improvisers of the *Commedia dell'arte*, knows the secret of surprise effects which will dazzle the audience. He knows how to hypnotize the people in the same way as the Indian Fakir who makes you believe that he is standing in mid-air. The art of the circus does not reach its true manifestation in the huge commercial circuses of America, for they are the product of capitalistic enterprise on a gigantic scale. The village circus is the ideal because it plays for simple people who allow their hearts to become childlike again.

The circus in the square at Mezökövesd reminded me of the wandering companies in sixteenth-century Spain described by Agustín de Rojas. Some of the artists were in rags and barefooted, others wore the remains of faded doublets and trunk hose that once had been bright in colour. Out of one of the caravans stepped an enormous woman who was the wife of the proprietor of the circus, a very diminutive man with huge whiskers, dressed in a black turned-green frock-coat and check trousers. In a few minutes the caravan was surrounded by every little urchin in Mezökövesd, and many of the peasants and their wives. A trio of monkeys clambered out of one cart and perched themselves on top of one of the caravans, scratching themselves, cracking pea-nuts and throwing the husks at the urchins beneath.

As soon as the circus was "parked" in the square, the job of unpacking started. Great big poles were dragged out and lashed to the caravans and masses of flapping canvas were stretched from one to the other, so that a huge

tent was constructed, and inside a miniature arena was roped off and sawdust sprinkled on the ground.

Among the circus workers was one gaunt fellow, who was working with demoniac energy, shouting himself hoarse as he tugged at ropes, and cursing the others in a curious jargon, that seemed to be a mixture of German, French and Hungarian. He was grey-haired and so mahogany in colour that at first I thought he was a Gypsy. When I said to him, "San tu rom?"—Are you a Gypsy?—he answered me in French. He was an Egyptian and was the Fakir of the company. He told me he had been living with circuses in Hungary for sixteen years and travelling ceaselessly from the Western borders of Yugoslavia to the Black Sea, but he hardly knew a word of Hungarian except a little Romany. "Ah, Monsieur," he said, "je suis citoyen du monde : j'ai voyagé partout." There was an air of pride about him which did not fit in with his ragged, unkempt appearance. His name, he told me, was Ali Hussein, and he came from Egypt. At an early age he became a circus acrobat and wandered from one country to another. "Many is the time I've been to England and performed in London at the music halls." Then said he, passing from French to perfect English : "I was well known in the Alhambra and Victoria Palace for my stunts on the trapeze. I travelled across the Atlantic too with variety companies and performed in New York and Chicago. Ah, how I used to love the life of the acrobat and the thrills of the circus. But, alas, one day my luck was against me : I fell off a bar and broke my leg at the knee and I was useless any more." Poor Ali Hussein, he was the living embodiment of the circus artists' tragedy—the tragedy of the broken doll that has amused the young people all over the world. When it is broken, what remains for it but the dustbin? Ali Hussein, after his fall, sank low in the world ; he became a tramp and beggar. Little by little he worked his way back towards the East, and when he returned to Egypt, he set himself to learn the Fakir's art, for thus he could go back again to the life of the tent and the caravan, his only joy in life.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, "whoever has lived the life of the circus can never live in a house any more. I must move on from one place to another, otherwise I feel restless and ideas of madness come into my head. My only pleasure is to roll over the roads and see new faces. For sixteen years I have roamed the Hungarian countryside and through Roumania and Bulgaria, always stopping at the same little villages and towns in the great circumference of our wandering. Look you here, sir, we circus people are a race apart. No one knows how we live, and they have the queerest ideas about us. I shall tell you. We are a simple people and we lead a simple life. How many peasants think that we are immoral and that we drink ourselves to death after a life of vice? That is not true. Life in a circus is that of a large family, for we are all one. We do have disputes, but they are the disputes of children who must obey their Father and Mother. And our Father and Mother are yonder little man with the whiskers and his fat wife. Everything we have we divide among one another; some days when business is bad we have hardly enough to eat, but we laugh and play pranks on one another, and so life passes away. Our folk marry early and they have children—for children are a godsend in a circus. We don't send them to your schools where you torture their little minds with facts they do not want to learn. No; we teach them to bend and twist and exercise their bodies when they are soft and pliable, so that the little ones become as agile as cats."

As my Arab friend spoke in this enthusiastic way of the life of the circus children, I thought of my own education. At twelve years of age, I was dressed in a tight Eton jacket and seated at a desk struggling over Latin elegiac couplets with my *Gradus ad Parnassum* before me. If I had only been with Ali Hussein I should have been a brown-faced little circus Arab, dancing from one horse to another and vaulting through hoops—full of joy of life, and eagerness, with not a care in life as long as that *Stradivarius*, which is our body, remained intact. Ali Hussein has one tragedy in his life, and that is his lameness, which prevents him

from doing hair-raising stunts on the trapeze. In every other respect, he is a philosopher. "There is only one thing that is worth while in life and that is freedom in one's mind—freedom to dream as we wander through the world. You ask me what is my address? I tell you I have no address, for I do not know where I am going next. You ask me have I Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Wife, Children—and I answer you that I have none. No, sir: I have nobody that belongs to me: nobody but God."

Ali Hussein has no vices and no wants. Sometimes he sleeps in the caravan, sometimes in an inn, sometimes in the open under the stars. Money is of no value to him except in so far as it enables him to buy cigarettes or drink a glass of wine. Of all the countries that he wandered through as a vagabond those that pleased him most were the Scandinavian because, he said, "the people there love circuses more than elsewhere and you may fish in the rivers for nothing."

Through Ali Hussein, I was admitted into the intimate circle of the circus and presented to Madame and Monsieur, as he called the Fat Lady and her husband. Madame was a florid woman and very voluble, but it was her timid-looking little husband who ruled everyone with a rod of iron. I have always remarked that a nervy man marries a fat placid woman, and his chief pleasure in life consists in imparting sudden electric shocks to her mountainous frame. Eating meals with Madame's household in the caravan was a tempestuous business, for everyone feared Monsieur's ire. He would work himself into a white-hot passion and then suddenly fire potatoes, bones or meat or anything else that came to his hand, at his wife or children. At the first of those not too Lucullian banquets that I attended I happened to be in the line of fire and received a burning potato in my eye! Monsieur, like Ali Hussein, spoke a variety of languages, but very imperfectly, and he was never able to make his meaning clear to me. If I had known Hungarian well I should have appreciated his rhetorical flourishes, but when he launched forth into German or

French he would suddenly stop poised in mid-air for loss of the crucial word.

There was one fairy in the ragged troupe—a little girl of ten years old, who was one of the dancers and trick riders. Her name was Gilda and she had Italian blood in her veins. Monsieur told me that she was a foundling that he had adopted and brought up in the circus. "She is the best draw we have," he added, "for she is the personification of the spirit of the dance: there is a strange wild rhythm in that little imp which works a spell on her and makes her dance all day and all night. Sometimes I think she will burn herself out like a candle by her untiring efforts." The little girl was already as full of mannerisms and affectations as if she had been born with a *prima donna's* gold spoon in her mouth. She postured, she pirouetted before us, and as I was the stranger she exercised all her tricks upon me. I have never seen any child so graceful. When she walked or ran she hardly seemed to touch the ground with her feet. She reminded me of a curious fact which I have noticed, that most of us dash through life, elbowing one another, jolting, bustling, tripping and generally following a vertiginous rhythmless course until Death ends the race. Some there are who dance their way through life, following an inexorable rhythm which little by little burns them up and consumes them like those rare melodies that the Indians speak of, which change those who sing them into blue flames. I am sure that if Gilda once fell she would never be able to catch up her rhythm again and she would whirl round and round in a maelstrom to destruction. When I used to see her dashing round the ring standing on her white horse's back I felt as if she was the beautiful butterfly on the wheel—a beautiful spirit sailing along at the edge of an abyss that threatens every moment to engulf her. She was a roguish little thing and her face was sallow rather than brown, her mouth dimpled with very red lips, her eyes wild and untamed. At first she sang a lilting song that she had picked up in Serbia and then she rushed off to fetch two boys of



her age who assisted her to do acrobatic tricks for me. She was an untamed animal and more muscular than the boys in spite of her fragile appearance. She had on one garment only, a faded frock that once was red, and nothing else. When she did cartwheels and somersaults she showed her body to us in all its nudity. Then she danced with one of the boys; a violent, spasmodic dance in which each tried to outdo the other in speed and agility. Finally they fell down in a heap exhausted and lay there laughing.

In the sultry afternoons everyone in the circus would take the siesta, and not a sound was heard in the caravans and tents but snores and the clinking of the chains of the animals. There is a certain period in the Hungarian afternoons in the countryside when every living thing seems to become scorched into a deep coma. The sun beats down on the farms and homesteads remorselessly and nothing seems to live save the buzzing flies. Even in the dead of night there is not such deep silence, but then towards evening a cool breeze stirs the leaves on the trees, an excited chorus of birds starts to sing, and everywhere we hear the shrill music which seems to be the salutation to the lumbering oxen that already begin to appear on the horizon, slowly plodding their way home.

When Curfew tolls there begins a period of feverish activity for the circus: the men feed the animals and draw out their variegated costumes from the big chests, the women put rouge on their faces and spangles on their hair. Already the circus band has started off to parade the town with drums, trumpets and megaphones. Soon there must be the grand parade on the cars where every circus artist appears in war-paint to dazzle the townspeople and draw them in their crowds to the evening performance which will start at eight o'clock. Even the animals share the excitement of their masters, for they walk up and down their cages, tugging at their chains, and the old bear already starts to improvise the dance that has been taught it by the Gypsy on the heated iron tray. As for me I had bethought me of my friend

Kovács, and as he was liberal he entertained Monsieur and Ali Hussein in the bar of the Rákoczi Inn with bottles of wine and beer. Soon Monsieur was half-tipsy, and it was with difficulty that we led him to the circus to prepare for the show.

As a performance it was the same old village circus that takes place in every country in Europe with the selfsame tunes, the selfsame acrobats and trick-riders. Monsieur clicked his whip and Gilda flitted by on her white horse, a fairy vision in white and silver. There was the same old Harlequin and Brighella, armed with bladders full of peas, and the red-nosed rough-and-tumble man. Ali Hussein would not have taken an honours degree in the college of Indian Fakirs, but he dazzled the open-mouthed peasants and their children by his disappearing tricks. To my mind there was not much respect in their attitude towards him. He was a Gypsy in their eyes, one of the semi-humorous Oriental goblins who was to bring them romance from the East and to be derided in return. Ali Hussein was an Egyptian and not a Romany, but if he had called himself Panuel, Duke of Little Egypt, everyone would have accepted him as one of the Great Band of Gypsies who invaded Europe in 1417, for I heard on all sides the word *cigány* applied to him.

After the show Monsieur invited me to eat a dish of *gulyás* with him and drink a bottle of wine in the caravan where he and his wife and Ali Hussein slept. It was a narrow waggon with two narrow beds: in one Madame squeezed her generous form, and in the other Monsieur lay. Ali Hussein squatted in a corner near the door on a doubled-up mattress. And so we passed most of the night, singing songs until Monsieur and Madame became too intoxicated and Ali Hussein made signs for me to go. Outside near the tent I saw Gilda, surrounded by her companions, dancing like a goblin in the moonlight.

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Story of Fair Manczi*

EVERY vagabond imagines that when he crosses the breast of yonder hill he will encounter romance. Else why ever go vagabonding? The moment I set foot in Mezökövesd romance descended to meet me and I was wounded to the quick. It was Manczi who made me victim. I met her in the dingy hall of our inn—a blue-eyed girl dressed in white jumper, white skirt and white stockings, with the daintiest golden ringlets framing her rosy cheeks. “Ah, here is the real innocent rustic beauty of the Magyars,” said I to myself, but why that golden hair and blue eyes? No, my girl, you cannot have roved over the plain from Central Asia, but sailed down the Danube from the North. She was a chubby girl, full of high spirits, and when she laughed she showed a set of brilliantly-white teeth. At first I thought she was one of the daughters of the establishment—a younger sister of the proud maidens who sat at the window on Sundays and looked disdainfully at the motley crowd of peasants. But Manczi had none of the airs and graces of the princess: she was too healthy and muscular to act like the princess in the fairy story who felt the pea through the piled-up mattresses. Manczi was the life and soul of the inn: the men teased her and chased her down passages, chucked her under the chin, pinched her waist, and she smacked their faces and made fun of them. Ah, Manczi, life in the inn would be gloomy if it were not for your golden hair that catches the sunlight and dazzles us all. She was coquettish with me: she ogled, she flirted, until I felt like a Cavalier of Spain: I wished I had a cloak, to lay it on the ground for her to step upon. “Here she is,” thought I, “a delicate rose fated to waste her sweetness on the desert air.” In the dining-room she

presided at a counter and everyone came up to ask her opinion on everything in the world. I was puzzled about Manczi, for she was so different to the modest women of the house, and she was too familiarly treated by the guests to be the daughter of the landlord. Then Kovács enlightened me. Manczi was not the lady of the house : she was the paid play-girl of the establishment, and Gluck secured her services that she might be a decoy. It was her duty to entice the men of the town to spend their evenings in the Rákoczi Inn, and pour their pengős into the family coffers. "She is worth her weight in gold to old Gluck," said Kovács ; "half the men wouldn't come here, if it were not for her charming smile of welcome. She sits there all the evening, reading a book, or talking to them, for by police order she is not permitted to go off with anyone until two o'clock in the morning. After that hour she may sit down and drink with you. If you have money to spend on her, you may then take her away with you." I was deeply moved by Kovács' words. "Poor girl : you are only eighteen years of age, with your hair still down your back, and here you are condemned to this monstrous life of cheap vice." Kovács laughed at my display of emotion and told me that Manczi knew more of the world than I did. "Ask her to tell you her story : she has seen life, I tell you. Hungarian women are very strictly kept and are never allowed to go about unchaperoned, but once they kick over the traces they go as wild as the horses on the Hortobágy." Kovács is an agreeable fellow, but he lacks the refinements of sensibility. He looks on women as the chattels of the male, fashioned in this world to serve as shock-absorbers and endure the lusts, caprices, blows and kicks of the Oriental Don Juan, who sends souls flying. Poor Manczi, I cannot help weeping for you, because you are a lithe, well-formed daughter of the people with a certain joyousness of temperament ; surely, your case is one that deserves pity ?

Late at night, after twelve o'clock, nearly everyone would leave the tavern, and yet there was Manczi seated

at her counter, dressed in her white jumper with the red embroidery, reading her book. How sleepy she looked as she sat there, and yet she would have to stay until two o'clock to see if anyone wanted her. One evening Kovács lent me some pengös, and I determined to sit up late and invite Manczi to drink with me and tell me her story. We were all alone in the coffee-room, for even the ragged Gypsy band had departed and there was only Lajos to bring us wine. Lajos is a roguish fellow and he winked his eye at me as he said to Manczi: "Go on, tell how you ran away from home. If you ask this gentleman nicely he will take you back to Mamma and Papa, and perhaps he will prevent them from smacking their little girl who ran away from home."

Manczi came from the large town of Miskolc, which is about fifteen miles from Mezökövesd. Her parents were prosperous people who had a shop and Manczi had all that a child could desire. She was petted and spoilt by her parents, but then one day her mother died and her father married a woman who changed the happiness of the house into woe. She had been an actress in a touring company, and she fretted at having to endure the monotonous existence of a provincial town. Anyhow, she would go away with Manczi's father for long periods, leaving the girl to the care of relations. Thus, it came to pass that Manczi grew up without any discipline of any kind. At fifteen years of age she was careering about the streets of Miskolc, hanging round the doors of the celebrated dance hall called the "Papagai," consorting with the *cocottes* or "dancing partners," as they were called there. It was not long before she fell into the hands of an unscrupulous Jew, who, after making her his mistress, turned her out on to the streets. Her parents were away in Budapest and she was afraid to go home, for everyone in the neighbourhood knew of her intrigue with the old satyr. So she joined a low-class travelling troupe as a chorus girl and wandered about the country. Then finally she became one of the many girls who live in the Hungarian cafés as decoys for men, and destiny brought her

to the little town of Mezökövesd near her home. All this story she told me amid laughter and tears. She was the most curious girl I have ever met, for her nature resembled nothing so much as an April morning in England—at one moment sunshine, at another showers of rain. She would drink off her wine with an impudent gesture and look at me with wild blue eyes and then burst into tears as she told me about her father. "I still love him," she said, "and it tortures me to think of how I've treated him. I know he has been searching for me for months, and he little knows that I am so near him at Mezökövesd. I ran away with that old satyr simply to spite him, for I was jealous that he had married again. I was jealous of my stepmother because she blotted out of my father's life the memory of my mother." She then went on to tell me of the misery of her life in the inn—the monotony and hopelessness of it all. No one could have any idea what it meant to have to submit every night to the promiscuous embraces of the strangers who could buy her at a low price. "It is not the inmates of the place I hate, for they are poor, decent souls, and I know them so well that I have an affection for them: it is those travellers from Budapest who halt at this town, in order to see the embroideries of the peasants: how I hate them and yet I must submit." I tried to comfort Manczi and persuade her to return to Miskolc: surely her father and stepmother would not be so inhuman as to refuse to take her back again? But the mere thought of returning home filled her with alarm. "You don't know my Magyar father: he would kill me if he knew my disgrace. No: I must go on living this life of misery until I am thrown out." The strangest trait in Manczi was her exterior light-heartedness. No one who saw her chattering away in the inn would ever suppose that she had a moment's qualm of conscience. The postman of the district told me confidentially, that it was a pity Manczi was a prostitute, for she would make the finest little country wife in the district. "She's the best mother of the whole lot of them," he said to me feelingly.

I had occasion to ascertain the correctness of his opinion before I left the Rákoczi Inn. My cubbyhole of a room was just above the level of a small stagnant river, into which flowed the drainage system of our part of the town. In the July nights, when the heat was stifling, the smell of the river became wellnigh unbearable. As a result, there descended upon me a terrible onslaught of my chronic malady, bronchial asthma. With difficulty I propped myself up on the bed by means of a pillow resting on my rucksack, and prepared to fight the battle for breath. Asthma is a curious disease, for it reduces the sufferer to the condition of one in an hallucination. I had taken several doses of brandy, from the emergency flask in my knapsack, and aspirin, but the result was to induce a curious semi-comatose state wherein various visions surged up before my mind. I was feverish, and when I closed my eyes, circles of red seemed to revolve concentrically in ceaseless rhythm: then I suddenly felt a buzzing sound in my head as though countless bees were making a hive of my skull. They buzzed and buzzed, and then curly snakes uncoiled in the darkness around me as though the hairs on my head had turned to Gorgon serpents and were about to lash me with their tails. After a period of ceaseless buffeting I seemed to pass away in sleep to the sound of my own wheezing breath. Then of a sudden I awoke in agony—I was suffocating and every muscle in my body was taut in the effort of gasping. I was helpless, for even the slightest movement meant agony, and then there was the terrifying sensation that the loss of breath would reach the climax, when the suffering would be intolerable. Hour after hour the agony seemed to last—and yet no relief. I had Himrod's herb powders to burn, but alas no match to light them, and it was now three o'clock in the morning. What was I to do? To one who is suffering from lung trouble in the watches of the night, solitude becomes intolerable. Oh! if I only had some dutiful damsel near me to soothe the pain that racks my lungs. Just at the very moment that I formulated the wish, there was a tap at my door and a

ghost appeared. It was Manczi dressed in a light-blue *peignoir* and carrying a candle.

The sight of that angelic figure made me think that I had passed into a further hallucination, but she said to me: "You looked so ill to-night that I determined to call in to see you before I went to bed." No hospital nurse ever had softer hands than Manczi, when she raised me up and soothed my pain. As she sat beside my bed, in the fitful light of the candle she looked like some strange good fairy that appears in the hour of distress and conquers the demon. She started to mumble prayers to herself, thinking that I was asleep, and gradually under the influence of those incantations, pronounced in Hungarian, I relapsed into sleep and her figure seemed to fade into a fresh dream. I was wandering down an immense corridor, and outside the building I heard a strange moaning music that increased and then diminished in volume. In the distance I could see a desolate garden with dark, glowering tree-trunks. But on all sides there were glow-worms sparkling, and in the air hosts of black and white butterflies flitted before my eyes in such numbers that my head reeled. And now the moaning music was becoming more and more distinct until it seemed to drive my consciousness farther on past the gnarled tree-trunks and foliage to a lake with hills around it. And out of this lake, as an embodiment of the sound, rose a fair-haired mermaid, an Undine spirit that beckoned to me with her song. And I felt myself sinking and sinking into her white arms, and the singing grew fainter and fainter and the atmosphere grew whiter and mistier until . . .

When I awoke the sun was streaming through the window and Manczi had disappeared. She nursed me, however, very tenderly during the days of my illness, and so much so that she incurred the jealous ire of the bony Adila, the drudge who considered me her personal care. I was glad to escape from my tiny room after witnessing a few famous encounters between the two women, con-



ducted in voluble Hungarian, of which I only understood the word *lubnyi*, which was bandied about frequently.

I was sorry to leave Mezökövesd because I was interested in the fate of poor Manczi. I urged her repeatedly to leave her present life and go back to her father at Miskolc, and I tried to show her the hopelessness of her case if she did not break away from Mezökövesd. But there was a great deal of animal fatalism about her: she had that curious resignation which refuses to allow the mind to stir from its lethargy. This resignation made her accept every terrible thing that befell her as if it was the most natural thing in the world. One night she rushed into my room weeping floods of tears. A drunken man had beaten her because she would not respond to his advances. Yet next morning, when I met her again, she was the usual fair-haired, blue-eyed Manczi, laughing and chattering as though nothing had happened.

I went so far with her as to offer to accompany her to her family. In my heart of hearts I was frightened lest she might accept my proposal, for the task would have been an arduous one. I imagined our arrival at the house of her father. First of all he would look at me suspiciously and fire questions at me in Hungarian, which I would fail to understand. Then in a stuttering voice I should try to explain Manczi's story by means of an interpreter, and it would all be very difficult, for the old man would think that I was one of her seducers.

No, there was nothing for it but to leave Manczi to her fate. She did tell me before I left Mezökövesd that she would go back and throw herself upon their mercy. The day I departed she accompanied me on my way, and gave me a silk scarf knitted by her hands as a souvenir. The parting was tearful and I saw her, far away in the distance, standing on the little bridge that spanned a stream, a figure dressed in white, with her hair glistening in the sunlight.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Out on the Puszta*

#### FOOD AND LODGING FOR A TUNE

I FELT as if I had been walking a lifetime over dusty roads and meadowland since I left Mezökövesd. I envied the professional tramps, for they can hypnotize themselves into a jog-trot and press on hour after hour mechanically. As for me, my heavy hobnailed boots lacerated my feet, and the weight of my rucksack and fiddle weighed me down as though I were carrying boulders. Across the River Tisza I wended my way and halted at the little town of Polgár. Then on again the weary road at haphazard, for I was determined not to ask the way. Mile after mile of cultivated land full of corn, gleaming golden in the sunlight. In one place I met an old pedlar who was trudging along carrying a sack on his back. We sat down together in the shelter of a tree and I offered him a share in a bottle of beer I had bought at Polgár. He in his turn took out some sausage and a loaf of bread, and we made a hearty meal. The old pedlar was an orthodox Jew, for he had on a black soiled gaberdine and a round black hat. I never have seen anyone so curious; he peppered me with questions in German as to my race, nationality and business. "I knew you were not Hungarian," he said; "you are too fair, and besides, you are not so arrogant-looking as the typical Magyar. As for me, I am Polish and I try to eke out a living in this country, but it is not easy." From his conversation I inferred that Poland must have been decidedly uncomfortable for the orthodox Jews in certain towns, for he showed no inclination to return to his native land. Instead he wanted to move on to Transylvania to the city of Nagy Várád, where

there were many Jews. Solomon, for so I called him mentally, was a keen business man, for hardly had we finished our meal when he opened his sack and insisted on showing me his knick-knacks and trinkets. My unkempt, poverty-stricken appearance did not convince him that I was penniless. "Come now, sir, I shall give you this knife for one and a half pengös : it is a gift and you cannot refuse me." In the end I began to feel restless and bored with the old fellow, for he never stopped his confounded questions. He managed to extract from me the information that I came from Ireland and he wanted to know was it not in England. "Ah, yes, I remember once reading in the paper of a mayor who starved himself to death for love of his country." I had then to tell him all the story of MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, in every detail, and explain all the vicissitudes of the Irish struggle for freedom—no easy task on a boiling day on the Puszta. At last I was able to get rid of him when he saw that there was not a cent to be made out of me, and he departed on the track of some peasants who were driving a cart drawn by two oxen.

It was now evening time and the sky was lit up in crimson. As far as my eye could reach I saw nothing but the immense sweep of corn-fields, faintly rippling in the breeze as though they were the waves of a yellow ocean. There is something primeval about those plains of Hungary in the setting sun, as though the humanity inhabiting them were still in the Biblical stage. I expected to see Ruth appear in the wake of the harvesters to glean the remaining sheaves. The sunset transformed the smiling fields into a great noble landscape with something cosmic about it, and my thoughts travelled far away to the parched uplands of Castile, between Medina de Campo and Salamanca, where there is naught to break the monotony but ghostly cypress-trees here and there. Above, in the sky, which seemed in this Hungarian sunset to be so far away, I could see pyramids, towers and castles battlemented. Why does a race perpetuate the scene of its beginning? I saw here upon the central

plateau of Asia, beneath the pyramid-shaped clouds, the snowy mountains in the distance and the nomadic race sowing the corn that would feed the bronzed men and women before they set out in the following year for fresh plains. At this tranquil hour of the evening, when not a living being seemed to stir, an overpowering feeling of loneliness descends upon the solitary wanderer. Wandering in the mountains never induces loneliness, because they limit the flight of the human spirit, but in the plain that loses itself in the blue horizon there is infinity. In the mountains I hear church bells resounding in the valleys, and there is comfort in the distant sounds of village life ; but in the never-ending plain, discouragement dogs the wanderer who longs to see hills in the distance, for they make him think of the spires and towers of cities. Probably this feeling of melancholy which I experienced was due to weeks of wandering in the plains, for the people who dwell in plains are never merry. I have found that their folk-music is always sad, and though the Hungarian rhythms lash us up to the pitch of excitement, they are always in a minor key.

Night on the Puszta descends imperceptibly, gradually, the stillness increases, broken only from time to time by the distant barking of a dog. It is mysterious to walk through the lonely fields between the thousands of corn-stalks that look like armies of motionless soldiers. Here and there, like colonies planted over the mighty Puszta, are farm-houses, or *tanyas* as they are called, with their clump of trees and their outhouses. Outside one I halted, and seeing a group of children with an oldish man and a woman, I took my fiddle out of the bag and played a few Magyar tunes. The children clapped and crowded round me, and then the man came up, put twenty filler in my hand, and motioned me to go away. Night had already descended, a balmy night with a brilliant moon, and as I walked along, rabbits and hares darted in amid the corn-stalks. On all sides there seemed to be a buzzing sound as though at night every living organism was palpitating in a general rhythm that was communicated

to the earth by the myriads of stars overhead. I was feeling very hungry and melancholy. I longed for a good dish of *gulyás* and some wine. The light of the moon is unkind, and I understand why vagabonds are afraid of her silver light: she is so cold, so pure, so heartless. I should be afraid to sleep alone here in the open under the moon, for fear she might bewitch me as she did Endymion. Besides, as a Gypsy friend once told me, fevers pollute the air in the moonlight and there may be witches about who try to draw her down by threads from the sky. The paths through the fields away from the high roads seemed to me full of phantoms and I wished I could find some hospitable cottage to rest my weary body, but just at that moment I could see no lights in the distance.

At last I saw a light through some trees and I came to a small *tanya* on a rising ground. I went up bravely to the door and knocked loudly. Not a sound did I hear except the barking of a dog somewhere at the back. Again I knocked and this time I heard footsteps, but nobody opened to me. At last a harsh voice shouted out some words to me in Hungarian which I could not understand, but which surely meant—"Clear out to Hell out of this, you son of a bitch!" I then remembered that Magyar peasants, like all other peasants in the world, are loath to open the doors of their cottages at night to strangers. After all the heath is a deserted place, and what protection would yonder peasant have if I was a fierce marauding Gypsy intent on armed robbery? My experiences in the Irish Civil War, when you were liable to be raided at any hour of the night in the country, should have taught me not to be insistent, but nevertheless I knocked away.

Not a sound. The peasant must have gone to bed, thought I. Then suddenly—an idea entered my head. Why not try the influence of music? Orpheus was able to soften even the heart of Cerberus, the three-headed dog guardian of Hell. I took out my fiddle and started to play "*Hullamszó Balaton*," followed by "*Cserebogár*,"

two tunes which should admit me to the innermost sanctum of the Magyar soul.



not a penny would either of them accept. All they did was to point to my fiddle, and instead of a stirrup cup, it was a farewell tune that I gave them. Few countries in Europe can compare with Hungary for spontaneous hospitality which is given to the stranger without any thought of favours to come. I am sure that fairy stories were invented by vagabonds who wanted to secure a bed and food, and it was they who told the peasants that the poor, ragged, dishevelled beggars were really fairies in disguise. "Yes, my good man: you must always be kind to them and give them good cheer, because they will bring the sunlight into your house and give joy to your children." In Greek days the traveller, after calling upon Zeus, walked into the cottage and sat down by the hearth, and the master of the house raised him from that suppliant position and made him sit by him at the table, for the stranger was under the God's protection and it was sacrilege not to assist him. I did not call upon Zeus, God of Hearth, but I trusted to Orpheus, a far more potent God among the rhythm-loving Hungarians.

In that *tanya*, life was sane and wholesome, in spite of its natural poverty. I have never seen a cleaner or more orderly house. The woman spent nearly all her day washing and airing sheets, blankets, eiderdowns. Around the walls were white cloths embroidered in red, trailed up as ornament, and in the corner of the kitchen was an enormous oak press containing quantities of linen. In the other corner was the huge green earthenware oven, rising from floor to ceiling like a gigantic olive jar. On a slab of brick in this oven they did their cooking, and above the fire was a rail, on which they hung bones to smoke. The oven is the great comforter of the home in winter when the wind whistles across the plain, and when the family are cold they sit around its broad base and tell stories. Early in the morning my host would depart with two of the boys on his cart, drawn by two horses, and in the evening after feeding the animals he would point to my fiddle and ask me to play again, such tunes as "Hullamszó Balaton." On the second evening some

neighbours came from a distance to hear me and outside the cottage under the clump of trees the inevitable *csárdás* began, and it was I who played them until I nearly fainted from fatigue. At last I saw the dance of the Tavern performed in all its manly vigour out on the lonely Puszta by the strong-backed sons and daughters of the people. Among these simple, unspoiled folk it became magnified into the lofty symbol of a whole race, and I could not help murmuring to myself the words of *Petőfi* : " Oh Puszta, Puszta, thou art the image of liberty."



*The Village Schoolmaster*

ONE day when I was playing the fiddle in a third-class carriage on the way from Füzes-abony to Debrecen, a young man and woman entered the compartment and sat down near me. There were many peasants and their wives there, and I was having a successful time, owing to my choice of Magyar themes. The young man was very insistent in his applause and fired a great many questions at me in Hungarian, to which I could only reply sadly: "Nem beszél Magyarul." Then he spoke German and we were soon intimate friends. After introducing me to his pretty wife he took down a big parcel, which contained a plentiful supply of cold chicken, ham, bread, cake and wine. Before we reached Debrecen he had made me promise that I would visit them at their house in the country. He was the principal teacher at a primary school in the village of Hajdunánás, near Debrecen.

Some days later, when I was wandering through the countryside near Hajduböszörmény, I took the road towards Hajdunánás.

After many fruitless searches I arrived weary and foot-sore at the farm-house of my host. I knocked several times without getting an answer, then finally he came to the door. I was surprised to see that his eyes were red with weeping and he was pale as death.

He then told me that his old father had just been stricken with apoplexy and was in a very critical state. The old fellow had gone out in the morning, hale and hearty, but then suddenly he had collapsed in the street. Inside the house there was woe and consternation: the old mother was wringing her hands, and the young bride was trying to console her.

My host insisted that I should stay, even though I tried my best to take leave, for the Magyar will never allow the stranger to depart without hospitality. He even brought me into the dim room where his father lay ill. Propped up on the embroidered cushions of the bed, the old man seemed to be of gigantic stature, and this impression was accentuated by the long white beard which encased his alabaster face. In the room the relatives came and went, flitting like faint phantoms.

Outside, all was brilliant sunlight, and the little bride brushed away her tears as though she felt ashamed because the honoured guest had seen them. She was a characteristic Magyar woman, eager to show me every corner of her spotless house and point out the white paint, the highly-coloured silks and brocades. At dinner I was placed in an embarrassing position because my appetite was not Gargantuan enough for the hospitable ideas of my hostess. After my plate had been crammed with mutton paprika and vegetables and after I had partaken heavily of the sweetmeats of Hungary, I had to give in and declare myself conquered. But there was *dinnye* yet to follow. Now *dinnye* is our familiar water-melon, but in Hungary its size equals that of a Soccer football. The slices handed to me by the dainty lady would, in my opinion, have satisfied a regiment. When I demurred at taking a third mammoth piece my host declared that his wife would be offended in her susceptibilities as housewife if I did not eat.

The meals were served to us out under the trees, and as we ate flocks of ducks and hens came up around us from the farmyard.

The life of those people at Hajdunánás was the essence of serenity and peace. The husband worked in the early part of the day at the municipal school and in the intervals he devoted himself to farming his land. He had fought all though the Great War and had been captured prisoner on the Italian front. "Don't think I bear any grudge to the Italians for that," said he. "Italy, through the influence of Mussolini, is one of Hungary's

best friends, and we must look to her in the future." Like many of his countrymen, my host had his head completely shaved in order to mitigate the effect of the flaming heat; when the autumn mists would come he would let his hair grow again. Later on in the evening some of the relatives whom I had seen earlier in the day made their appearance again, for it was the custom to play string quartets under the trees after supper. There was a young officer in hussar uniform who played the 'cello, and two other citizens of the village, the butcher and the chemist, who played the viola and violin respectively.

The shadows of the evening descended and enveloped us in darkness, but we played on. Our host brought some pine torches, and in the light of their flames we deciphered Haydn and Mozart. Our music awoke echoes among the trees, and when we would stop between movements the silence was eerie. Such was the setting of the quartets of Haydn, which brought out all the Croatian Gypsy origin of many melodies that the composer had heard on his excursions through the forests on the estates of his patron, Prince Esterházy. Outside it all was the silver moon, gazing coldly and sardonically upon us as we sawed our strings. Every now and then a small white phantom would dart out of the trees towards the farmhouse: it was our hostess, who would hasten in to see how the poor invalid was doing.

Late at night, before we retired to rest, at the wish of our host we all assembled outside the windows of the old man's room to sing a hymn in chorus, to wish him speedy recovery from his illness.

*The Funeral of a Gypsy "Primás"*

OLD Racz had been for many years a respected *Primás* or leader of a Gypsy orchestra on the Hungarian Puszta, and few of the villages that lie on the roads between Debrecen and Mezökövesd failed to welcome the visits of the strange little old man with the fiddle in the canvas bag. No rollicking fair was alive without the music of Racz, and the girls would wait on their doorstep, aye, or else follow him up the streets when he appeared with his ragged band.

But for some weeks old Racz had been very sick, and it was heartrending to watch him trying to coax a tune out of the fiddle when he had hardly the strength to lift his bow. He would sit outside his small house shivering and not a word could I get from him except—"I am dying, I am dying," which he would say time after time. One morning when I arrived at the house I heard from afar a confused wail that rose and fell like the moan of a storm. When I entered I found chaos: the daughters were lying on the ground shrieking their woe and tearing their hair. The men members of the family were standing by in a corner in a silent group: each of them had a glass in his hand and they were drinking *recti* or brandy. In a corner on the bed lay a figure, whose features seemed to be carved in white marble, and at his head were two candles whose sputtering light threw strange tessellated shadows across the coverlet. So this was a "wake," in honour of the dead, and my mind involuntarily went back to former days in the West of Ireland when I had heard the women "keen" the corpse of an old peasant I had known. In Hungary among the Gypsies, grief was more unrestrained than in Ireland: the women would start up and apostrophize the corpse, crying out "Why

did you leave us? Why did Death carry you away, when you should have been our protection?" Then came a pause as if the women were waiting for the corpse to answer. When no answer came, then the shrieks of anguish would commence again. One woman in the corner began to sing in an hallucinated voice a wild song of Death and then everyone listened in silence. The scene recalled another one I had seen in Sardinia, in the house of the peasant, when the mourners became so excited that they translated their grief into rhythm and danced around the corpse madly for a certain time. Then when the dance finished the lamentations ceased. On this occasion in Hungary the exit of Death was more impressive. The son of the old man asked me to go to the funeral next day, and punctually I arrived at the house carrying with me my violin, for so I had been ordered.

What was my surprise to find a great crowd gathered outside. All the Gypsy musicians of the town and of the surrounding villages were there carrying their instruments: here I saw violinists of every description—some with beautiful fiddles and white bows tipped with silver: others from the humble hamlets with ragged, weather-beaten instruments whose varnish had been worn off, and with bows of rough black horsehair. There were violoncellists carrying on their backs their heavy instruments, looking like snails with their houses on their backs. I saw cimbalom players, flautists, trombonists, clarinettists, bagpipers, and all the rest of the motley orchestral crew. The day was grey and threatening as though the sky wished to point the moral of Death.

Suddenly the procession started off from the house, and following the hearse came the long trail of musicians. At the head was the son with his fiddle.

As if by sudden accord the music started. It was a passionately sad *lassu* that I had often heard played by Magyári Imre at Budapest. Everyone joined in the performance as they walked slowly in the procession. The fiddles went in line, then the violoncellos, which were fixed in some way by straps to the necks of their players.

Slowly the procession wended its way through the town and dense crowds stood silently by to let us pass. The chief mourner, at the head of the procession, gave the lead to all the rest and the melodies that were played were those that the old man had always preferred.

As I walked along I could not believe that I was living in twentieth-century Europe in the age of motor-cars, aeroplanes and sky-scrapers. Here was a scene that brought me back to the Middle Ages when the Troubadours and *Jongleurs* flourished. I had seen a similar scene in Ireland once when all the pipers piped the body of Arthur Darley—noblest of Irish fiddlers—to its last resting-place. Here was a far nobler conception than our funerals, where respectable Death is squalid and intolerably shoddy. The musicians by paying such a dignified tribute to one of their number gave glory to the noble calling of the Hungarian Gypsy minstrel who preserves for the peasant the latter's own Magyar music.

On moved the funeral slowly through the maze of streets and yet the music never ceased. Sometimes the procession seemed to lag as though worn out by its sad thoughts; the pauses in the music then held all in suspense and involuntarily I would cease breathing; then at other moments when the violins quickened their pace the men would press forward under the impetus of the rhythm. As we approached the churchyard the harmony redoubled. I could see that some of the players were nearly fainting with exhaustion, especially the 'cello-players with their ungainly instruments, but not once did they slacken their efforts: they gripped the strings with their bows, wiping away now and then drops of perspiration that rolled down their steaming faces. At the graveside everyone stood round the grave and within the circle stood the son of the dead man. As the men lowered the coffin into the grave he played the last lament over his father. He was a slight young man, sallow-complexioned and with tousled black hair. So possessed was he by his sorrow that as he played the *lassu* he swayed his body, and I saw the tears trickle down his violin. At one moment,

in the paroxysm of sorrow which seemed to pass all bounds as he found expression in his music, I thought he was going to cast himself, fiddle and all, into the open grave. The music surged in a great ocean of harmony and the vibrating note of the solo fiddle resembled a candle in the wind, blowing this way and that. Sometimes the surging waves of music swayed this way, threatening to engulf us all in its flood, then it would recede and pause in its course. The solo violinist, however, did not pause for long: on he would dash again with restless short bow strokes and repeat for the hundredth time the theme, as though he wished to burn it into our hearts. Why should this *lassu* ever end? Grief increases by its own luxuriance, and when there are no limiting words, music leads us into a world where there is no end and where our spirits wander unfettered.

"Now you can understand," said the dead man's son to me as we walked back from the graveyard, "why we Gypsies worship Death, and why our most solemn oath is '*Ap i mulende*' or 'By Death.'"

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Debrecen*

#### THE CITY OF MERCHANTS

**A**FTER wandering through the Puszta it was natural that I should turn my footsteps towards the chief city of the plain, Debrecen, which has been called the city of merchants. Debrecen has been the granary of Hungary, with warehouses crammed with the wealth that sprang from the rich soil. Situated on the highway connecting the west of Hungary with the golden province of Transylvania, it became the great centre of trade in cattle, horses and wine. In the dim past it was a Slav settlement, but then came the Hungarians and Magyarized it completely, and later on in the twelfth century the Flemish, who gave a character of economic stability to a city that was already famed for its fairs. There are many records of the thirteenth century which show that the city was celebrated for its rich guilds and later on the Emperor Sigismund granted it the rights of a royal city.

In the sixteenth century the power of the merchants of Debrecen must have been very great when they drove their sleek cattle herds from the Puszta to the fairs of Vienna, Munich, and Nuremberg. Grave and dignified worthies they were, those rich merchants, and we should have expected to find them in counting-houses of the Lowland countries, rather than on the wild plains of the nomadic Hungarians. Grave they were too, in their religion, for they were the bulwark of Protestantism. They attached themselves without any hesitation to the Reformation of Luther and later on to Calvin. In the seventeenth century when many other cities of Hungary were medieval in their life and manners, Debrecen was a centre of middle-class life. We always hear the accusa-



tion levelled at Hungary, that it has never produced a middle class to hold the balance between the nobles and the peasants, but we may point to Debrecen as the true democratic city of Hungary with its society of merchants.

Debrecen suffered the terrors of Turkish persecution during those years when Mussulman power swayed the country, but the historians say that the city endured fewer hardships than the rest of the country.

All through the plain, villages and towns fell into ruin and the thrifty city would buy up the land, until at last it possessed nearly 38,000 acres. In the Wars of Liberation in 1848 Debrecen became the seat of Kossuth's government, for in the city and the surrounding country were the staunchest supporters of the great patriot. In fact, what strikes the stranger is the tenacious character of the people and their four-square honesty. They are not flippant or fawning in their manner, but as truly courteous and dignified as a concourse of Castilians in Burgos. Hear them say to a lady, as they take leave of her: "Kézét csókolom, nagyságos asszony!" and it would bring irresistibly to your minds the *Vaya Vd. con Dios* of the Castilian peasant. When I was at a drinking-party at Debrecen I noticed that every time Magyars raised their glasses to drink they bowed and drank to the health of the guest. The custom was very charming and reminded me of parties in Stockholm, where the host would drink to the guest, saying the magic word "*skoll*." In Sweden, it was the custom for the cavalier who was toasting a lady to gaze into her eyes until he set down his glass. I told some Hungarian girls of the custom, but their dark eyes were too fiery for me in comparison to the blue eyes of the Swedes.

My first days at Debrecen were sordid and uneventful. I was determined to return to the normal life of baths and clean sheets once more, and I had some money in my purse. So I went to the Bika Hotel, which is the best-known *rendezvous* in the city. Here I found modern life once more with electric light, barbers, tourists, travel-agents and commercial men. After wandering on the

Pusztá it was pleasant to sit on the broad verandah of the hotel in the cool of the evening listening to negro jazz tunes tortured into a semblance of rhythm by Gypsies dressed in evening suits, with white ties. Jazz played by those Gypsies who copy foreign performances will not stir anybody's musical soul. Jazz sounds falser here than in England because among the peasants who feed this city by their toil on the plain there is a genuine, live folk-lore and the duty of the Gypsies is to keep it alive by their playing. The Gypsy is the salvation of those countries, because his music is the antithesis to machine-made sound. The Gypsy improvises, remembers tunes he has heard and makes them all pass through his personality. There is nothing mechanical about his art which varies from minute to minute. But when he tries to copy the negro-American saxophonists and drum-players he loses his birthright and it becomes a sorry performance.

The verandah of the Bika Hotel is the cynosure of every eye in Debrecen, for the citizens promenade up and down the street in front of it at various hours of the day and they are eager to notice new faces. Hence I did not long remain in obscurity. My waiter had the ferrety eyes and sensual mouth of the born gossip and he peppered me with questions. Where had I come from? Where was I going? Did I come from England? Did I know the *Daily Mail*? My answer in the affirmative to the last question filled him with excitement. "Ah, Monsieur, you are English and therefore you are a friend to Hungary—*attendez un moment*—I must bring up a gentleman who speaks French." Then he rushed off and came up with a tall red-faced man who very courteously inquired if he could be of assistance to me in anything.

This gentleman, whose name was Gyula Hadfy, was a sugar inspector. In Hungary one of the great industries is beet-sugar manufacture, and this gentleman's duty was to wander through the country from village to village contracting with peasants for the plantations of beetroot which are to be passed into sugar. Words could not repay the debt of gratitude which I owe to Mr. Hadfy, who comes

from the town of Hatvan. Not only did he introduce me to the notabilities of Debrecen, who pampered me with hospitality, but he also took me out with him on his expeditions into the country. From farm-house to farm-house we would wander while Mr. Hadfy would work himself into paroxysms of excitement, arguing with the peasants over the price to be paid for the beet crop. The farmer would meet us at the entrance to his *tanya* and lead us into the snug kitchen with its embroidered tablecloth. Then the arguments would begin. The man would be very cold and suspicious at first as if there was some snag in the proposals made by the commercial man, Hadfy. The wife of the house would stand behind her husband's chair and every time the man had to say a word he would give a sly preliminary glance at his wife as if to say: "You are the economic head of this house, not I; why don't you give your decision?" Whenever Hadfy would strike a bargain with any farmer he would take him in his car to the next *tanya* so that the peasant there might derive confidence when he saw that his neighbour had agreed to the contract. Hadfy told me that the peasantry in those parts of Hungary were surprisingly acute men of business and that this was due to the fact that there was not a single illiterate among them. He informed me that there were many cases of farmers taking their university degrees before they settled down to cultivate the land. For this reason the country in Hungary is populated by contented peasants who have no intention of swelling the idle mob of the city. If Virgil had been living to-day he would consider that the land around such small towns as Hajduszoboszló and Hajdunánás was the embodiment of the spirit of the Georgics.

Life in Debrecen changed for me after I met Mr. Hadfy, for he introduced me to his friends and they were as determined as he that I should not leave the city without visiting every place of interest, whether theatre, school, conservatorium, museum, or factory. I was taken from one place to another, fed with huge dishes of *gulyás* and given bottles of Tokay to drink. One man I met, called Nemeth Nándor, the proprietor of an hotel, went so far

in his hospitality as to ask me to stay as his guest. The hotel, curiously, was called the "Angol Kiralyné Szalloda," which means the hotel of the English Queen. Mr. Nemeth, as befitted the owner of such an hotel, was a great admirer of England, and he explained to me that the Hungarians in Debrecen would give me unbounded hospitality because I was English. I hastened to assure him that I was not English, but Irish, but he did not understand the distinction, though he acquiesced in calling me British. The great hero of the English in that part of Hungary is Lord Rothermere and one of the streets in the city is called Rothermere *utca*. His advocacy of Hungarian interests in the *Daily Mail* has filled the people with gratitude and on all sides, even in the hovels of the Gypsies, I heard the cry "Lord Rothermere: *Éljen! Éljen!*" The people, after mentioning the *Daily Mail*, would say: "Ah, why may we not have an English King to rule Hungary? England is our friend and she will always see that justice is done to us. Why could one of her noble lords not be persuaded to become King of Hungary?" The idea seemed so fantastic to me, that I was struck dumb with amazement, but I heard it from many people. I should not envy the lot of the English or Scotch Lord who would accept the task of becoming King of a Hungary that has driven out the Hapsburgs and refuses to return to the old feudal days. Certainly in any attempt to place a king upon the throne the king-makers will have to deal with the people of Debrecen, who are hard-headed, democratic burghers of the Flemish type.

One of the most attractive men I met in Debrecen was a Dr. Dicsig, a well-known jurist and member of the city council. He is the living proof that the Hungarians as well as possessing a similarity of language to the Finns are like them in physical features. He stands six feet and is as massive in build as a hero out of the Kalevala. His hair is fair and his eyes grey. I was not surprised to hear that he was a good boxer and a champion tennis-player and swimmer. In Northern Europe we are apt to forget the powers in athletics of the countries of central Europe. The

modern Hungarian excels in the various modern sports and bears very little relation to the character that fiction has given him. Dr. Dicsig's wife was a fair-haired Szekel, that is to say from the far-off province in Transylvania planted by the followers of Attila to cover their retreat from Europe. She is one of the best-known doctors of Debrecen and has a large practice as a surgeon. The Dicsig *ménage* is a contrast to the old-fashioned notions that people have concerning Hungarians. Both husband and wife have separate professions at which they work so hard that they have no time to feel bored with one another. They live together nine months of the year and for the remaining portion they agree to take a holiday apart. In that way they contrive to lead an ideally happy life together. One bond unites them : music. Dr. Dicsig plays the piano and his wife sings Magyar folk-songs—sad melodies from her Szekel ancestors which have been collected by Folklorists in her native town of Csikszereda. At the hotel of the English Queen one night Dr. Dicsig took a private room in order that I might play for his friends. There was wine, there was music, there was gaiety and there was *Mulatni*. We sang, we shouted, we laughed until tears ran down our cheeks. The gallant doctor sang Magyar songs, and his wife danced *csárdás*. Suddenly the door was burst open and a wild figure rushed in, seized the violin from me and began playing at a furious pace. It was Racz Jancsi, the Gypsy violin *Primás* of the hotel—a well-known minstrel in this part of Hungary. It was his free night of the week and he was dressed in a very loud suit of brown with pink checks. He had partaken very freely of Tokay and was inebriated : his long straight black hair fell over his face and he looked like a Red Indian preparing himself for the orgy of an eagle dance. His sallow face was all convulsed with excitement as he bellowed at us. It would be more correct to say that he raged rather than played and the effect of it on us was that of an electrical force which swept us off our feet.

"Where is your Flemish ancestry now, O Citizen of Debrecen ? " said I to Dr. Dicsig as he was shouting himself

hoarse in song. There was not much chance of Racz Jancsi allowing those staid merchants to lisp their songs of the Turkish domination to the melancholy tone of the *Tárogató*. Every youth in Debrecen seemed to play the *Tárogató* as a duty, just as every Andalusian strums the guitar, but they throw them away when the Gypsy with his fiddle approaches.

As for me, I felt weary of the excitement, for I had been satiated with *Mulatni* for weeks past. I longed for peace. I made signs to a girl called Juliska to follow me and we went out on to a balcony at the back of the hotel. It was a moonlight night and everything was so still out here, though in the distance we could hear the faint echo of the music.

Juliska was very pretty in the Magyar way : she had very brown skin and deep black eyes. She was unhappy because she was married to a man who suffered from dyspepsia and was always in a bad humour. She was married off to him by her step-parents when she was only a young girl just back from a convent. "The moonlight night is dangerous, Miss Juliska," said I, "for it will make you tell me your secrets : you know, I am a self-constituted professor of Don Juanism and that gives me a mission in life to explore the emotions of distressed damsels. I know what is wrong with you, Miss Juliska ; you were married off to your delicate husband before Don Juan appeared on the scene and you call out to him. Alas, he may not come because your husband guards you as jealously as if he were afraid even your thoughts should be unfaithful to him." Juliska then told me all her sad story, and I pitied her exceedingly, but I felt that the telling would comfort her. One of the charms that the wanderer possesses is that you may tell him all your tale as if he were your confessor, and he departs on his way, carrying within him your secret. In that soft moonlight night, Juliska made me her confessor, and it was I who wiped the tears from those dark eyes and pressed that little hand. "Ah, Juliska, I wish I were a knight-errant of the older days : I should carry you away on my courser and shelter you. You would be free from

that odious, miserly little man who vents his spleen against you. I would give you courage to escape from the fiendish cruelty of that conventional life which hems you in here. You should ride on horseback over the Puszta, with your black hair streaming in the wind and your pale face flushed with health and joy, instead of attending on the sick-bed of a querulous invalid all your life. What will happen to you, O Juliska? You will become resigned to your fate, for you are a religious girl, and you were taught that woman's duty is to resign herself—or else you will follow the example of those Hungarian women who sought out a witch-wife and made her prepare subtle poisons to release them from those husbands whose tyranny had become intolerable."

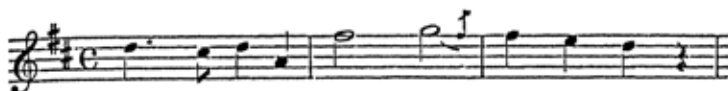
These were the thoughts that passed through my mind as I held Juliska's hand and soothed her woe in paternal fashion. Suddenly I heard a rustling noise behind me: it was Juliska's husband—a gaunt, cadaverous spectre, like the skeleton in the Dance of Death. He looked at me with an expression of sneering contempt, and then he started to rasp out reproaches at his wife. The girl received them meekly, without a word, and went inside. For the rest of the evening I was afraid to look at Juliska and I could only follow Dante's plan of gazing at a point just above her head as I played Gypsy music. It was cruel to play *csárdás* to her, for it only made her more conscious of being the caged bird.

CHAPTER XVII

*The "Fata Morgana"*

WITH THE COWBOYS ON THE  
HORTOBÁGY

THE GOLDEN AGE



NEAR Debrecen is the famous Hortobágy plain inhabited by the traditional herdsmen and cowboys—the land of the *Fata Morgana* or *Délibáb* as the Magyars call it. The Hortobágy is about 170 kilometers in length from north to south and its foundations are diluvial strata. Through this immense plain runs the River Hortobágy which divides up into smaller streams and irrigates the land. Over the wide expanse of these steppes since time immemorial there have roamed herds of cattle and horses and no attempt was ever made to cultivate its flooded meadows which became the haunt of wild geese and water fowl.

In the ancient days of King Arpád there existed eleven villages, some of which had abbeys. According to historical records, those villages were destroyed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by plague which raged throughout this part of Europe. In later days the three villages of Mata, Zam and Ohat lost their population during the sad period of Turkish rule and were bought up by the city of Debrecen.

The first impression the wanderer derives of the Hortobágy is one of sad monotony. Over the Puszta in Hungary one may see the unending, waving ocean of corn-stalks and Ceres comes to life in person, but on the Hortobágy nothing is to be seen mile after mile but the tedious, barren steppe.



And yet this is only the superficial view. As you advance over this steppe, on all sides there are strange visions of beauty that arise before you, for this is a land apart, peopled by a race of men that do not belong to modern days. The Hortobágy is the most romantic part of Hungary and it is here that the anonymous folk-songs of the Magyar are inspired by a life that seems to partake of that Golden Age which poets have always sung. Here the primeval Turanian Magyars may still be observed tending their cattle and wild horses in the nomadic pastoral life. When they came to this plain centuries ago they drove before them huge herds of cattle with long, silver-white horns which they had seized in the plains of South Russia, and it is the descendants of those cattle that we may see to-day as we roam over the green expanse.

My first impression was one of immensity, but then I began to distinguish mounds here and there in groups. These hills, I was told, are not the work of nature but of man. When they were examined they were found to be tombs dating from the period between the Neolithic Age and the age of migrations. The men who are buried in them once inhabited the plain, and hunted, fished and grazed their cattle where now the shepherds and cowboys roam.

As I walked across the Hortobágy the heat of the sun on this August day was terrific, and nowhere could I see a tree or anything which would give a particle of shade. I was feeling weak and thirsty : my throat was parched, and I would have given all I possessed for a pitcher of water. Suddenly in the distance I saw streams of water flowing and rippling in profusion. I plodded on manfully towards those streams, but alas they vanished suddenly, and I was left with the vista of the green desert. Then one of my companions said : " That is the famous *Délibáb* or *Fata Morgana*—the most famous phenomenon of our Hortobágy : look over at the horizon ! " I then saw that the horizon was circular in shape and surrounded by masses of rippling water. As for the plain, it seemed all of a sudden to have become an island on that water, and the animals grazing

in the distance seemed to be standing on stilts in the water, while below them, as it were in the depths, were little clumps of trees, church-steeple, farms and wells. I rubbed my eyes, for I seemed to have strayed into a mysterious fairy-land where scenes shifted every second before my eyes. At times I felt like Alice in her Looking Glass world, when every normal thing became warped and distorted. At one moment I saw a solitary grazing cow reproduced in countless numbers all around the horizon. At other times I gazed fascinated at a church, which seemed to have become suddenly inverted in a sea of mist, and beside it was a whole wood floating in mid-air.

Hungarians are never weary of talking about their *Fata Morgana*, and it becomes in their minds a kind of symbol of the illusions of life. Here in this immense solitude where everything is majestic and poetic in its harmony, nothing prevents me from dreaming. There is serenity and tranquillity everywhere : at times the silence becomes terrifying in its intensity, but then I hear the distant tinkle of the bell of some grazing animal, or when dusk begins to fall like a cloud of thin sand dropped in our eyes by the fairy sandman, I hear far away the sound of a shepherd's flute.

Writers have always longed for a golden age when mankind would be good and simple and they would set it in the past before Zeus succeeded to the age of Saturn. Here in the Hortobágy among the shepherds we may still find the golden age that writers living in cities long for, and in this wide plain the *Fata Morgana* plays the part of the goddess of fantasy. I live here in my rude hut, I tend my herds all day under the scorching sun, day after day, year after year, but for ever there is the *Fata Morgana* in the distance to tell me of magic realms of gold where the streams run milk, honey and wine. The *Fata Morgana* tells me of the garden of the Hesperides, where the apples are golden and where beautiful maidens dwell. Ask any shepherd on the Hortobágy about the *Fata Morgana* and he will weave wonderful stories of the powers possessed by the *Délibáb* over the lives of men.

These shepherds are the living embodiments of the

golden age to which I have referred. They are magnificent specimens of manhood: their skin is dark brown, for it has been tanned by the sun's rays, and they look like statues cast in bronze. They live simple lives and their bodies are proof against the fierce inclemency of the weather. Among their folk there are different ranks of herdsmen. First of all comes the *csikós*, the guardian of the horses that range untamed over the plain. He is proudly conscious of his superiority in the life of the Puszta, and he looks down with scorn on the other herdsmen. Do not ask a *csikós* to drink with a cowherd, for then he would smash his glass and insult one whom he considers inferior. After him comes the cowherd or *gulyás* whose duty consists in watching over the herds of cattle and in watering them. This duty is no light task, for he has to dip the bucket into the wells and draw it up by means of the long wooden arm hundreds of times.

After the *gulyás* come the *juhasz*, a shepherd who watches the flocks of sheep, and the *kondds*, or swine-herd. They are the lowest in the social scale because they have a much lighter task than the cowboy or the cattle-herd. When you wander over the plain you may see them in the evening wrapping themselves up in their *guba* or mantle of sheepskin, and leaning on their big sticks. They have astonishingly sharp dogs called *Puli Kutya*, who do all the work of keeping a flock together. I was told that when dipping-time comes it is the dogs who drive the sheep on to a floating wooden structure in the river and then make them fall into an enclosure in the water, in which they are washed white as snow.

The herdsmen whom I met reminded me very forcibly of the *gardians* in the Camargue and they have the same wonderful facility for telling how many animals belong to each owner. In fact, the salty expanse in the South of Provence bears many resemblances to the Hortobágy. There is the same legendary tradition in the *gardian* as in the *csikós*, but in the Camargue the church of *Les Saintes Maries* with its Gypsy pilgrimage takes the place of the *Fata Morgana* in Hungary. Along the shores of the River

Hortobágy there are nooks here and there thickly covered with reeds, where we find wild duck, snipe, and in the waters there are delicious fish which are sold in Debrecen. The fish preserves are famous in Europe. There is a huge artificial lake, surrounded by small ones, in which the fish are kept, and railway trucks are driven right up to the edge so that the fish after packing may be exported to all parts of Europe. From the lake we trudged along the plain to the place where the cowherds were assembled, and after visiting the King of the herd, a magnificent bull of enormous size, whose horns were tipped with brass, we went on to see the wild horses.

The Hungarian horse is not so delicately beautiful as the Arab steed, but it is tough and strong owing to the training it receives on this plain, for the custom is to leave the horses out in the open in all weathers, and even when snow covers the ground it is a common sight to see them roaming over the plain, long-haired, with their backs covered with snow. The horses are left free to roam at will, and they are only brought in at feeding-time. One of the most wonderful sights on the plain is to see hundreds of them coursing together in the distance against the flaming background of the setting sun. The *csikós* is their master and friend. He spends all his life on horseback, and he rides rough-rider fashion, without saddle, on a piece of red cloth to which the stirrups are attached. There is no horse so wild or capricious, but he can keep his seat on it and he flies over the Puszta like the wind. And he can also throw the lasso or *panyva* as well as the cowboys of Mexico or Texas. To-day he uses the lasso to catch the horses, but in the War of Liberation of 1848-9 he used to catch men when he joined the famous band of cowboys under Alexander Rosza and pursued the bands of Austrians and Russians. He is a romantic figure, dressed in a white cloak, embroidered in red and black thread, and on his head he wears a broad black felt hat. Like the cowboy of Texas, he is a silent individual, and he gives vent to his emotions chiefly in sad songs, which he sings as he rides after his herd.

There was one cowboy on the Hortobágy called Kovács, who was as aristocratic a human being as I have ever met in my life. He rode up and greeted me with a noble dignity, and when he heard that I came from England, he took off his hat gravely and said: "I salute England, the friend of Hungary." Later on after sunset I visited him in his hut and joined him at his evening meal. With me were the Commissioner of the Hortobágy, the Veterinary Surgeon, Mr. Nemeth, and a musician from Budapest, called Deszö Gabor. When the cowboys expressed themselves in Hungarian one of my friends would translate for me into French. The hut where the two cowboys, Imre Kovács and Károly Tót, lived was very primitive, so primitive that, except in rainy weather, or during storms, they always sat outside. At the back lay one diminutive camp-bed with several sheep-skins thrown over it. While one is sleeping, the other keeps watch over the horses, and when it is the former's turn to sleep he gets into the bed that is still warm after his companion. The shepherd's hut is made of mud, with a roof of cane, which projects into long eaves. It has no window, but only a door and a tiny hole for ventilation. The two cowboys told me that only in very bad weather did they lie on the bed, and they mostly used the hut for storing their food. On starry nights they preferred to lie outside on the ground wrapped up in their woolly cloaks. At the back of the hut they make another structure of cane in the form of a horseshoe, open at the top and with a rough door, so as to protect the fire against the wind when they are cooking. "This is our traditional hearth," said Kovács to me, "and we roast our meat on yonder spit over the fire." There was also a big wooden bough to hold the pot over the fire, and Károly Tót was stirring the food in it with an iron spoon. The fuel for the fire was dried cow-dung, which gave a most fragrant smell, though its pungency caused my eyes to water. As soon as the food was cooked we all sat down on the grass outside the hut and the two cowboys served us with a kind of stew called *Tésztakása*. Their food generally consists of a soup seasoned with vinegar called *Fehéreczetes*, and *szalonna*, a

raw, salt-cured, uncooked bacon, washed down with some rough wine.

The scene that stretched before us was worthy of a patriarchal age. From the mound where the hut stood we could see right across the immense plain that seemed in the distance to rise up to the level of the stars. Over some dim spots there seemed to float a mist, and we had the impression that we were floating in the air together with millions of living particles. Here and there we could hear the faint tinkle of bells, and near at hand we were enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke from the long pipes of Kovács and his companion. One characteristic I noticed in the furniture and accoutrements of those cowboys was the way in which they ornamented every object of personal use. In the hut the little bed and the chest in which they kept their clothes were ornamented with tulips and their long pipes and even their whips were adorned by hand with spirals, blue and pink, and green, recalling to mind those of the Red Indians in New Mexico.

After we had finished the repast Kovács in a deep bass voice started to sing what he told us was the traditional song of the Hortobágy :



“Csikós, gulyás meg a futó betyár,  
Ménés, gulya, rajtad, szabadon jár.  
Tündéred az enyelgő délibáb,  
Vickándozva jáccik idébb—odább.”

The music of the cowboys on the Hortobágy is of a kind that is unique in European folk-lore, for the songs have descended for centuries among this queer nomadic folk who live out on these plains, far away from the everchanging life of the cities. One of the friends I made in Debrecen, a Professor Istvan Ecsedi, the Curator of the Museum in

the city, has made a deep study of those songs from the musical and the folk-poetry point of view, and has published a charming collection of them which has added considerably to the folk-song study in Hungary. The melodies are simple but with a profusion of *parlando rubato* which varies according to the singing of the individual shepherds.

My friends told me that the subjects sung by Kovács and his companion were concerned with the life of the shepherd on the Hortobágy and his sufferings from heat, cold, and loneliness. There were some of the songs that sounded to me decidedly malicious in intent, for the two men shouted the words out and laughed at the end. Those songs were satiric parodies of the swine-herds and the cow-herds who were a subject of mockery to the aristocratic *csikós*. There is no bitterness, however, in their satires on one another, for they are a strong race full of vitality and far removed from any petty considerations. As the veterinary surgeon said to me, they may well be kind to one another for they are perfect specimens of manhood, hardened by the open-air life. Their food is so simple that their digestions are never ruined by it and stomach complaints never trouble them. They live apart from the toil and trouble of the world, caring only for the animals entrusted to their care. Many of them are married, it is true, but either they leave their wives in Debrecen far away from their life, or else they bring them to share the Spartan existence of the hut. And what woman could avoid becoming as hardy as her husband and as lofty in her dignity when she is set out in the region of the *Fata Morgana*? Everybody who has lived with the cowboys says that there is not a trace of envy, malice or avarice in their nature, for the wilds have taught them to be openhanded and frank with their fellow-men. It is said, too, that none of them was ever known to have committed theft. Long ago they had a grim time preventing the *szegénylegény* from stealing their animals when they were resting. The *szegénylegény* was a species of horse-thief who used to camp out on the plain and, when the opportunity offered itself, would mount

one of the horses and gallop off like the wind out of pursuit. But nowadays all those ragged Gypsies have disappeared before the onsets of the Hungarian police and the cowboy may play his flute in peace and dream of the *Délibáb*—for his horses will not wander far afield. Besides, as a race those cowboys have the most astonishing bump of locality and can read their way over the plain by the stars at night. They have no clocks in their huts and reckon by the sun. On one occasion I had to find a particular hut on the plain during the night, but after a while I had to give up the task. It was impossible to find my way, for everything looked alike and one of my friends when he found me after several hours of fruitless searching, said that I had been turning about in one circle and returning again and again to the same spot.

As I sat round the fire with my companions on this sultry August night, I felt the thrill and the joy of the bivouac, but when I thought of the winter months I could not help shivering. Then would the wind whistle over those steppes, which would be white with snow, and the lonely sportsman or fisherman who cuts holes in the icy river to catch the small fish would see the green-eyed, glistening ice-maiden and hear her cruel laugh. Then would the plain be empty, for the herdsmen would have driven the cattle away to their winter quarters and the white carpet of snow would cover up every living thing, until the spring came to wake the land to life once more and the *Fata Morgana*, or "The Dawn" as the national poet of Hungary, Jókai, called her, would appear once more.

Another day when I was on the Hortobágy with my friends I visited the *Hortobágy csárda*, or Hortobágy Inn, where travellers may stay in comfort in preparation for their visit to the plains. The inn is a long, low building, built in Hungarian style, with arched porticoes. The rooms, which are luxurious for such a primitive place, are filled with old Hungarian furniture and china. The most interesting part of the inn is the saloon bar, where all the cowboys come to drink. It is the one ancient part of the



whole building, and I do not suppose it has changed in the last two hundred years. I noticed that the bar was protected with wooden trellis-work which could be lowered. My friend the veterinary surgeon told me that this was a salutary precaution taken by the management of the inn against the cowboys who, in the excitement of *Mulatni* and *whoopie*, cast their mugs and bottles at the head of a refractory bar-tender. The "Master of the Horse" told me that such fights are not infrequent on Saturday nights when the cowboys have some money in their pocket, but they are merely due to the ebullience of their nature and have no serious consequences. I feel sure that even in the undemonstrative British countries we can show nearly as much ebullience on Saturday nights after a football match.

My last vision of the Hortobágy was from the garden of the veterinary surgeon's house, where we were served one evening with a cold banquet by his charming wife, and as we ate carp, cooked in vinegar, and drank dry white wine, we heard the Master of the Horse whistle to some cowboys with whom he wished to speak. He is the great ruler of this vast demesne, and has full responsibility for its efficient management. He knows all the by-paths over the plain and the hidden places: every cowboy responds to him when he whistles a certain call. He is the king of that strange race that live apart from other men and bear so many of the qualities of past humanity when the world had still some bloom on it. If I were to choose one example of Magyar manhood and set him out as an expression of the nobility of a race I should choose my friend Kovács Imre, the cowboy riding his black horse swiftly over the plain towards the red horizon. It is for him that the *Fata Morgana* promises the land of plenty in a golden age.

*Passing into Transylvania*

## THE LAND BEYOND THE FOREST

I AM on the road again and I feel sad, for I am leaving hospitable Hungary where so many deeds of kindness were lavished upon me. To-day I feel as though I were about to enter fairyland, for Transylvania is called by the poets a magic country. The land beyond the Forest calls up visions in the mind of feudal castles perched on mountain-tops, of ghostly, ravaging Turks, of savage monsters of the woods, of vampire-haunted dungeons. Transylvania was the country I had promised to visit when I made the blood promise to the Gypsy prisoner in Italy. Who knows where he is now, ten years after? Probably I should never see him again, for when he made me promise, it was not to him I gave my word, but to his Gypsy race. "Never break a promise given to the Gypsies, for when you promise, it is not to me, but to my tribe, my race, you bind yourself."

From Debrecen I tramped along the roads towards the frontier, and I halted for a rest at the village of Puspök-ladány. It was Sunday and all the peasants were dressed up in their embroideries. Passing the frontier was no difficult task, for the customs officers saw I was not a Magyar, and one of them even offered me cigarettes.

I was in high spirits to have passed into Roumania without awakening any suspicions. In Hungary people warned me against playing the vagabond in Roumania. "You will be treated badly," they said, "and the police will think you are a spy." It was useless for me to say that I was going to Roumania, where my only spying would be done against the Gypsies. "Nobody will believe that you are not some correspondent in disguise of an English newspaper with Hungarian sympathies." One fat old

gentleman at Debrecen spoke confidentially to me and advised me to say in French always "que j'étais venu en Roumanie pour voir les Tsiganes et les putains" !

In the broiling heat of the afternoon I made my entry into the city of Oradea Mare, or, as it is called in Hungarian, Nagy-Várád. As I entered the city I could not help wishing that I lived back in the year 1417 when the Gypsies made their grand entry into Western Europe. I should have dressed in pilgrim's habit as they did, and I should ride on an old horse up to the gates of the city, pulling after me a lean and hungry dog. Then I should demand to see the mayor of the city. He would not be in any hurry to see me, but I would then address his minions, saying : " Behold I have come to your city as a pilgrim and I request your kindly protection in the name of God and His son Jesus Christ. I come from the country of Little Egypt. God has struck my land with sterility and has condemned me and my folk to wander for seven years through the world in order to expiate the sin my ancestors committed. For you must know, sirs, that they offended God when they refused hospitality to Mary, Joseph and the Infant Jesus, who fled to Egypt to escape the vengeance of Herod." Then the gates would be thrown open and I should be fed, housed, and it would be an honour to entertain me, seeing that I was a pilgrim on a sacred mission.

Alas, no privileges to-day fall to the lot of the Gypsy, and I was face to face with the realities of life. Oradea Mare is full of wide streets and parks thronged with people. Here would be the ideal place for a street-player, thought I, and I spied out for a suitable spot to begin my performance. In the centre of the city is an open space with big hotels, the theatre and the imposing Palace Café. The space in front of the café was crowded with people who stood listening to the discordant jazz band within the enclosure. What a fool I was to pit my puny strength against blaring saxophones, clashing cymbals and clattering drums. The crowd in front of the café did not diminish : nobody came my way save two old women, three dogs and a few ragged

children. After I had played for some time the two old women yawned and trotted away. Finding that the crowded part of the city was bad for business I walked down to the lower part of the town where the houses were drab and the streets were full of cringing street-women. Here I had luck immediately, for as soon as I had played one tune a fat woman looking like a Jewess came up to me and gave me ten lei. In an hour I had made thirty lei from various sources, and I was able to treat myself to a cosy dinner and a drink of watered wine.

The moral of that evening for me was : "Never put your trust in princes : shun the gaudy parts of the cities if you want to make money out of your fiddle." In these days of hot jazz the fiddle is the instrument of the humble and the ragged. It was different in the days long ago, when Stradivarius hung his new instruments up on pegs in the organ loft of the Cathedral to tone the varnish in the golden atmosphere before he sold them to princes. In those days the violin was the joy of kings and queens, and Corelli would play upon it Church sonatas. To-day the fiddle has descended to the minstrels, whence it sprang originally. After my experiences in front of the Palace Café with its jazz, I felt tempted to say a prayer to the Devil and ask him to take back his instrument and give me one with more of his Satanic spirit in it, to make those *blasé* modern men and women dance a witch dance to the sound of my playing.



## PART II



## CHAPTER XIX

### *A Transylvanian Village*

#### HUEDIN

**T**RANSYLVANIA is a country of contrasts : at one moment you wander through undulating plains, then you are transported into mountainous country and deep ravines full of torrents and wild crags. It is a romantic scenery, full of melancholy, and for some reason it reminded me of the *morriña* of the glens of Galicia in Spain. After Oradea Mare my next halting-place was to be Huedin, or, as it was called by the Magyar, Bánffy-Hunyad. Before reaching the village I skirted the River Körös, which is sacred to the memory of the Gypsies of old and revered by them as the river of gold. In the bed of that river the gold-washing Gypsies used to gather the alluvial gold and in return for their toil they were given special privileges by the Empress Maria Theresa in the eighteenth century. Though I roamed far and wide by that melancholy river I never met the ghosts of those nibelungs who filled the coffers of the kingdom with the shining metal. To-day the Körös has no such title to fame and its muddy stream flows through the fertile fields, undisturbed save by the village folk. The country around Huedin is one of the richest parts of Transylvania, and in the late summer the wanderer sees it to its best advantage. The roads are laden with carts drawn by fat oxen, and on all sides through the green fields we may watch white figures working at the task of gathering in the harvest.

I arrived in Huedin after six o'clock, just as the sun was setting, and every gabled house was bathed in crimson light. The streets were full of carts, for the peasants were returning from the fields, and the monotonous rumble became an insistent drumming rhythm in my ears. On



the carts came in relays with the oxen plodding along in step to a majestic dance.

The women were chatting in groups in front of their houses, and when I walked up through the main street, carrying my violin and rucksack, many turned round to gaze upon me, curiosity mingled with distrust in their countenances.

A stranger is as much an object of suspicion here as in Arran, thought I to myself, as I halted to ask the way to an inn. The girl I spoke to was eagerly occupied in staring at me from top to toe. When I asked her a question she became completely confused and rushed off to call an old woman to her assistance. For the life of me I could not make either of them understand in my bad Roumanian that I wanted to find a tavern. A little farther up the street I came across a group of Gypsy women who were carrying sacks of coal. They looked at me with curiosity, but they did not behave like the peasants. They fired a volley of questions at me, asking where I came from and where I was going and did I *bashavav* well (pointing to the fiddle). Two half-naked brats, nearly as dark as the coal they were carrying, stopped their game and rushed up to beg a coin. Their game seemed to be vermin-hunting. When I turned to leave them the children followed me all the way up to the hotel, pestering me and pulling the lappets of my coat.

The principal hotel was called the "Tigris," and there I found a society that recalled my days at Mezökövesd; there was the inevitable pocketless billiard-table, with the waiter in shirt-sleeves making up a game with a bottle-nosed gentleman of the petty clerk variety. In another corner were four men playing cards in the intervals of consuming large glasses of beer. Every now and then a girl in a very short dress appeared on some pretext or other, her face heavily rouged and powdered. When she passed a sickening halo of cheap scent filled the air. The green baize cloths, the voluminous spittoons, the general smell of tobacco, beer, and neighbouring latrines, gave me a feeling of nausea. Such hotel cafés are an improvement on our

public-houses in England, but after a sojourn in the Wilds of some days it is depressing to be launched again into the platitudes of bourgeois life, which varies little whether the scene be Transylvania or Tooting.

Outside, the air of the evening was balmy, and there was silence now, for the oxen and their owners had lumbered off to rest, and the sun's rays had faded from the street to make way for the shadows of evening. It was a picturesque and straggling village with rough cobbled streets and houses, that had a certain individuality due to the carved wooden doors and verandahs. I have rarely seen so entrancing a place for the folk-lore enthusiast: at every step I saw a picturesque figure. In one place I saw two queer old men with white heads, dressed in the white skirt-trousers and black hats of the Transylvanian peasant, smoking their long pipes outside their houses. On the other side of the street a group of young girls were sitting sewing; one of them was as fair as a Saxon, but another had coal-black hair and a milk-white complexion. They reminded me of "Snow White and Rose Red" in Grimm. Along another road the cows were coming in from the field: there were fifty black ones with crumpled horns that passed me, followed by the shepherd. After him came a solitary urchin of three years old driving a white cow up to a well in the middle of the street.

The whole village in the half-light had an air of distinction which we rarely see in the country. I think it was due to the artistic carving of the woodwork. The houses were originally mere whitewashed shacks, but the rough artistry of the peasant had transformed them by the slanting roof and carved door into an object of beauty. In many cases the houses were dilapidated, for poverty reigns in Transylvania, but it is a distinguished poverty. Beyond the street stretched the monotonous plain and in the distance the dark mountains. The last flicker of the sun lit up these fields for an instant and after that the darkness descended like a cloak on the village. One by one the lights appeared in the houses and there was silence.

It is not always easy for the wanderer to discover a

comfortable resting-place in a village like 'Huedin. The majority of one's friends will recommend such an hotel as the "Tigris," and doubtless the only comforts of the town are to be found there. For me the "Tigris" was out of the question: I emptied out my pockets and discovered that I had only the minimum amount of money to keep me alive until I could get to Cluj. On the advice of one of the waiters in the "Tigris" I went to search for lodgings of the humbler kind near the railway station. I came to a rickety building with a large sign-board declaring that it was hotel and restaurant. I rang a bell repeatedly, but no one came: I shouted myself hoarse, but there was no answer, and my voice echoed and re-echoed through a long, damp passage. Then a surly voice sounded from the bowels of the earth and I saw a tousled head at the other end of the passage on a level with the floor. When I demanded a room the owner of the voice climbed out of a trapdoor and stood gazing at me from head to toe in a most suspicious manner. Without saying a word he led the way out to a yard and along a broken-down verandah to a room which he informed me could be mine. I think the surly man when he scrutinized me must have assigned me my room as a result of first impressions.

To tell the truth, I was unkempt, unshaven and dirty: hence there was no reason why I should be given palatial apartments.

It was more like a cell in gaol than a room in an inn. Inside all was dark. I looked for the window, but could only find a hole in the wall covered over with a black rag. As a slight concession a tiny oil-lamp was hanging by a nail from the wall. There was not the sign of a mirror, jug or other toilet accessories. The bed was leaning perilously over on one side, propped up by a packing-case: no mattress, but a mass of straw had been strewn and over it was laid a very dirty sheet, the edges of which were frayed with age. The surly man looked surprised when I asked for water for washing, and I felt that when you reach an advanced stage of griminess it is an indiscretion to ask for soap and water. After shaking his head he

went into the yard, picked up a tiny battered tin basin and filled it with water from a mossy green barrel. With this I was supposed to perform my ablutions.

The only normal object in that room was a very melancholy *chaise-longue* that stood in a corner. I tried to sit on it, but the legs gave way and I subsided to the ground. Poor sofa, thought I, when did you begin your life? What intimate scenes of wickedness did you witness that your end should be so mournful? A room with the bed and the *chaise-longue* could only belong to a special sphere of life: we associate it with the flashy parlours furnished in Louis the Fifteenth style that are let out at so much an hour to *cocottes* and their cavaliers. I was glad to escape from my foul den into the light of day, and I took refuge in a small wine-shop, where I found a group of peasants drinking. The women were dressed in national costume and looked most picturesque. One girl especially attracted my attention, for she was the living embodiment of Verga's Santuzza. She was dressed in a pink pleated skirt and had a short black bodice edged with gold braid and heavily embroidered. The lapels opened in front and I could see a frilly blouse underneath. On her hair she wore one of those red and yellow handkerchiefs that we associate with Gypsies, but she had arranged it in such a way that the yellow part covered her head and the red hung behind as a veil. She was fat and vivacious and her hazel eyes had a malicious expression which was not contradicted by the heavy, sensual mouth and the very red lips. When she walked she moved forward with the fast stride of the young animal, as though through years of carrying weights on her head she had trained her hips to respond to the rhythmic harmony of her body. As I saw her there laughing and drinking I thought of Santuzza again, or of "La Lupa," the insatiable witch-woman with her great eyes, advancing towards her frenzied lover, her arms full of poppies. Every now and then I could hear her say something crude to excite the sensuality of a man who was sitting opposite: he was a massively-built young man, about six foot five in height, and when he stood up he had to bend in order

to avoid striking his head against the ceiling. The proprietor of the inn was a fat, florid man, incoherent in his speech : but when he saw me he became inquisitive and wanted to know all my reasons for visiting Transylvania and for leaving my country. His suspicions of me seemed to increase when he saw my violin. I suppose he thought of me as some wretch of a white Gypsy from Poland. He served me, however, a good dish of meat and the everlasting paprika and a glass of the classical *Hosszu Lépes*, a Hungarian mixture of two-thirds soda-water and one-third wine. My supper only cost twenty-five lei, which is less than sevenpence ! After I had finished I amused myself by watching the peasants : some of them were arguing fiercely about horses and calves ; the women were gossiping about a marriage that was to take place in a farm near them ; an orthodox Jew had just brought in two very simple-Simon-looking peasants and he was plying them with drinks ; I wondered what cunning scheme he was going to spring on them. They looked so helpless as they sat there in front of that jerky little man in the black gaberdine who wagged his head as he talked in a nasal tone and gesticulated to explain his meaning. This country is overrun by these orthodox Jews in their greasy black coats. They are not popular with the Roumanians, for they have mostly come in from Poland and they exploit the peasant. The ordinary Jews who have long dwelt in Roumania are well-considered, but not these inquisitive, alert men with their ceaseless bargaining and their oily manner.

I felt lonely in this café, for nobody paid any attention to me, the solitary wanderer, seated alone. I therefore went on to another café of the more bourgeois kind, where there was a very genial *pincer*, or waiter, who recalled to me my former friend Lajos of Mezökövesd. It is curious how indispensable a genial waiter is to those small country-towns where pleasures are few and life continues in unending monotony. To-night I felt unutterably bored, for there was nothing to do and in the dark streets the phantom peasants in white passing by looked like souls flitting in

a limbo. "What on earth do people do here at night?" I asked my waiter. "Nothing at all," answered he; "there is no cinema and no brothel." Mezökövesd could do better, thought I, as I tried to read by the impossible light of a smoky oil-lamp.

Later on in the evening matters lightened somewhat owing to the arrival of the Gypsy band, but alas they did not get farther than the stage of uncovering the moth-eaten double-bass, which stood in a corner, and the cimbalom. They yawned and lolled about near the billiard-table waiting for some customer on whom they might inflict their music. Their mood was distinctly minor in key as if the depressing café, with its fly-blown mirrors, its dirty tables marked with rings from the beer glasses, its piles of cigarette-stumps, all symbolized an existence that was only fit for yawning. When I spoke to them they cheered up slightly and told me that it was on the nights of the Fair that Huedin was gay: at present the peasants were out all day labouring in the fields, and at night they went to bed early. On Fair days they always had a crowded audience and there was plenty of *Mulatni*. Eventually I got into conversation with a group of young men of the neighbourhood—sprung, I should imagine, from the shop-keeping class of the community. They looked on me as some queer supernatural being when I told them that I had been in London. They all seemed to consider the United States of America a mirage of good fortune, where everyone would meet with the fate of Rockefeller or Henry Ford. One of them, a youth of twenty-one called Bara Moris, told me he was saving up to go out to Cleveland to his brother, but the difficulty was the quota system adopted by America recently. Another man in the group fascinated me because he was so unlike all the rest. He had a queer Gypsy face, and when I said to him—"San tu rom?" (Are you a Gypsy?) he answered in perfect Romany. He was sallow in complexion and had curly black hair and a military moustache. He had fought in the Great War in Italy for the Austrians and had been wounded in the fighting on the Asiago Plateau. He had also been in France

and knew every street in Paris. Owing to his efficiency in languages he became an interpreter on the Continent after the War. He had wandered around most parts of Europe and had been employed mostly in Constantinople and Salonika. He was a pleasant fellow, very caustic in humour, but I have never seen a more shifty face. I could not make out why he should ever have settled in such an out-of-the-way spot as Huedin and none of the explanations he gave me was satisfactory. It is very common to meet such a man in the crowded streets of Bucharest or Belgrade, but I hardly expected to meet him here. By his alertness and cunning he had acquired an immense ascendancy over the simple minds of the inhabitants, and he certainly had introduced many disturbing habits that were unsuited to the simple life of a country town.

Later on in the evening he asked me to go with him to a house he had opened in the town, where there was drinking all night and women. "You know, sir, Huedin is a dead-and-alive place: there is nothing for a man to do here but watch the occasional trains come in and watch them go out—knowing that eventually, no matter how slow they travel, they will arrive at Bucureşti, the capital of our country."

"But why do you live here if you want an exciting life?"

"Well, you see, sir, I want to wake up this town and make it modern."

"Don't you think the people are happier as they are? The peasants who till the ground and sell their cows and sheep at the fairs here do not want your modern life, with its dancing-halls, cinemas and jazz bands."

"That is where you are wrong: this town has now more than a hundred commercial people and clerks who do not want to bury themselves for ever. Besides, we have also the government officials from Bucureşti who live at the Hotel 'Tigris.' It is for them that I run my house and bring down a few women from Hermannstadt and Oradea Mare to brighten up things. Soon I hope to get money enough to start a cinema and after that a decent

dance-hall with a jazz band. You know, sir, what we want here is a couple of saxophones and a few good brothels."

As I looked at the man my heart sank. His face was flushed with excitement as he described his pet schemes ; he was not only out for his own pocket—no : he was out for an ideal. The country parts of Roumania must be made as progressive as the Middle-Western states of America with this modern civilization. I had rapid visions of Huedin under his tutelage : a new town with factory chimneys smoking, five cinemas with fresh hoardings in front of them plastered with the faces of the latest Hollywood atrocities, two dance-halls with two jazz orchestras each, and a special esplanade with a military band to play on Sunday evenings. And what about the women in all this transformation ? They will learn how to wear short skirts and be initiated into the mysteries of vegetable silk, rouge and liquid powder, so as to conceal the blatant freshness of their country complexions. They must no longer wear their veils or thin embroidered bodices, for that is old peasant style : no, they must dress like the great modern army of the World's workers who are all exactly alike in personality, dress and sentiments whether they are in Roumania, or in Rochester, New York State. I imagined my Roumanian girl with the black hair and pale face : she will be ashamed of her homespuns and her embroideries : she will throw them away and buy some ready-mades at the new town store which have come from Germany. She will no longer sing her *doinas* about the house and rejoice in every little turn she can put into the traditional Hora when she dances it : no, she must master the mechanism of the "Blues" or the "Black Bottom" and despise her old father and mother who belong to a rough, uncouth age when people had not received the benefits of a mechanical civilization. As for the young men, her friends : they are mechanics and they go out no more over the hillside with their cows : they leave her alone by the ingle if she cannot smoke cigarettes and jazz with them. So I mused on as the dreadful little man un-



folded his schemes for the regeneration of rural Transylvania. No longer did I feel boredom in that hotel café : the very stains on the floor, the moth-eaten double-bass, the mouldy cimbalom aroused my affection. I got up to go away, but he followed me talking eagerly. Outside the night was beautiful—one of those balmy late summer nights when we smell the scent of the coming harvest, when everything seems still and yet in the distance millions of tiny particles seem to throb with life.

*Fair Day in Huedin*

IT was a fair day in Huedin.

The air resounded with the hoarse cries of peasants, the shrill laughter of women and the cackling of geese. Along the dusty roads rumbled countless carts drawn by drowsy, swinging oxen, laden with the produce of the fields.

When I came out of my cubby-hole the morning sunlight dazzled my eyes. Its magic rays lit up the main square of Huedin and transformed the booths of the fair into an Oriental bazaar. A pile of water-melons in one corner looked like gigantic emeralds and the shawls of the peasant were brocades from Damascus to me. Every available space was filled with tents, wherein excited women called out their wares : fruit, vegetables, poultry, ribbons, combs, brushes, brooches—every conceivable object laid out in profusion ; how could anyone resist buying from those eager women ? But this part of the fair is not so much a business as an amusement, for it brings joy and companionship to those girls who have the daily monotonous round of the peasant's tasks. Every Tuesday they may meet their friends for gossip and chatter to their hearts' content.

Three girls were laughing at an old wizened woman who was telling them a story : " I tell you she met him down at K  r  sf   near the bridge, but the husband lay in wait for them one night and caught them—the fellow hasn't recovered yet." What a story of love and passion arose before my inner eye, but I was afraid to be caught eavesdropping and I moved over to where two peasants dressed in white were arguing about the price of calves. Soon the square became incredibly crowded and the excitement grew in intensity : it was all a gigantic conversazione with side-shows for the curious. There they would all stay

until the heat of the sun imperiously proclaimed that it was time for the siesta. When the heat began to be unbearable I fled to the "Tigris" Hotel and took refuge in a big café at the back, which was already full of peasants drinking with their wives. The "Tigris" is a very respectable hotel, and caters for the isolated commercial travellers and respectable bourgeois in its front café, with the inevitable billiard-table and upholstered chairs. In the barn at the back the motley crowd of peasants, fresh from their bargains at the fair, gather together to cheer their gains or drown their losses. The Gypsies had already arrived, for I saw a dark, curly-haired little fellow pull a fiddle out of a bag and start tuning it. Gypsies have keen noses, and when they smell the scent of a fair they make a descent in numbers on the village and from morn to evening the streets resound with the twang of instruments amid the creaking of the carts and the shrill shouts of the people. The little Gypsy had a companion with him, a coarse brute of a fellow with a jowl like Bill Sykes: his villainous expression was not lessened by the slouch cap he wore pulled down over his eyes.

Nobody at first paid any attention to them and the low, vaulted, whitewashed room rang with the laughter of men and women as bottles of wine were consumed one after another. Transylvanian women possess the secret of colour: their embroidered bodices and the handkerchiefs round their heads set off the classic beauty of their faces. Near me was seated a young girl with the most beautiful brown hair I have ever seen; her complexion was tanned and her eyes shone like emeralds; she was engaged in an animated conversation with a young farmer who whispered continuously in her ear. There was no false modesty about her as she accepted with pleasure the attentions of the susceptible swain. In another corner of the room were two hunchbacks huddled together dealing out greasy cards to one another.

I got into conversation with the Gypsies and encouraged them to start playing. First of all they went over to one table where a fat man was seated with a youngish woman

by his side. He had evidently had a good day, for he pulled out a bundle of ten-lei notes as he called the waiter for wine. The woman saw the notes and as quick as lightning she grabbed two of them and stuck them in her bodice. The man gave a coarse laugh and held up his glass to her lips.

Meanwhile the waiter had returned with a *stiklā* or jug of wine and the Gypsies crept up noiselessly to the table. As they played the farmer began to sing and soon the woman joined in with him. It was a grotesque sight to watch the fat man's body wobble in time to the dance played on the cracked, out-of-tune fiddle of our Gypsy friend. Then from the other side of the room I heard discordant sounds; some other Gypsies had set up a rival orchestra and were playing away to a table full of revellers.

The noise soon became deafening—shouts, laughter, the buzz of ceaseless conversation, and through it all the squeak of fiddles out of tune playing discordant counterpoint in different keys; then the smell of wine and beer and the pungent odour of unwashed, perspiring bodies. I was glad to escape from the Tower of Babel into the sunlit street. As I left the "Tigris" I stumbled against two strange young girls who were resting in the shadow of the hotel. They were both barefoot and in rags; indeed, it would not be incorrect to say that they were all but naked, for the rags they wore displayed more of their forms than they concealed. They were both as dark as mahogany, and one of them had thick lips like a negress. At first they were shy and sullen when I spoke to them and they tried to slink away. However, as soon as I gave them a few coins they became lively and irresponsible Gypsy girls ready for any mischief. They had come to Huedin from a small village near Almás and were trying to do some begging or stealing at the fair so as to bring something back to their own tribe.

It is curious what a contrast those Gypsy girls present to the peasant girl of the country: the latter is invariably subdued and modest even to excess in the presence of strangers. Unless she is with girls of her own age she does

not raise her voice : not so with those Gypsy girls ; they were full of boisterous, animal spirits. They skipped about the street, they climbed up lamp-posts, they chased one another like cats, they used to come rushing up to me and look at me in a strange quizzical way and then burst out into loud laughter. They were not beautiful and I am sure Cervantes would have hesitated to call either of them his Gypsy maiden, but they were as gay as crickets and their laughter was contagious. As for female modesty, there was not a sign of it ; the younger one felt some insect pricking her, so she lifted up her rags and scratched her groin unconcernedly—a minute later she showed me a mark on her left nipple, where she said she had been bitten. I found that certain words of the Gypsy language were familiar to them such as *bashavav*, *mol*, and especially *lubnyi*. As far as I could infer, both of them considered that to be a *lubnyi*, or whore, was the most satisfactory occupation for one of their sex. It was difficult to know what to do for their entertainment. They were so ragged and so nomadic in appearance that I feared they might make me too conspicuous in the "Tigris" Hotel, which does not cater exclusively for Gypsies ; besides, one never knew what might happen if those Gypsy girls got into the rhythmic exaltation of drunkenness ; so I brought them to one of the booths where trinkets and cheap brooches were for sale and asked them to choose.

Nothing could have raised their spirits so high. With shouts of glee they fingered the tray full of rings and bracelets ; they fastened brooches on their smocks, and I felt as if it would be necessary to buy up the whole shop for them. Finally I asserted my will and paid for two rings and two brooches. The woman who owned the booth did not see the humour of the situation and looked most reprovingly at me as I walked off with my two companions. She had kept an eagle eye fixed on those Mercurial maidens, for fear that some of her rings might be spirited away.

And sure enough, hardly had we reached the end of the street when the younger one, with a smirk, pulled out three rings, four brooches and a bangle from between her breasts.

I was amazed at such skill in stealing a *pastesas*, or with the fingers, for I had been particularly careful to watch their nimble fingers as they fondled the trinkets and I had not seen anything suspicious. I must have looked perplexed, for they both laughed uproariously and danced round me. The more I looked at them, the more they began to take shape in my mind as goblins. If I saw them under the light of the moon I should shiver with fear to be near them, for I am sure they would be followed by a *Vila* or fairy playing on the flute. Even their grotesque ugliness fascinated me, for it seemed to bring them close to the earth. They must have come from those fastnesses in the Transylvanian mountains where we meet the *Oameni micuti*, the little men who blow their horns in the distant realms of elfland, or else from that hollow where the Devil holds his school and teaches magic to the ten scholars. Civilization had not produced any effect on those two strays : they could not write or read, life was simply to them a nomadic existence : here to-day, there to-morrow. "Where the sun is shining let us play merrily without a thought of the morrow ; as for food, the Lord will provide from the superabundance of the rich ; as for drink, are there not myriads of springs of fresh water in Transylvania ? And occasionally a charitable *busnó* who may give us wine or buy us dainties." But when the winter comes then will life bear down upon them like an avenging host, for their hovels and underground dens will not give heat to their wasted bodies.

Cervantes was right when he said that Gypsies were the kings of the fields and prairies, forest, mountains, springs and rivers ; for their steeled limbs the hard ground is as soft as eider-down and their rude skin is like a cloak of defence or a coat of armour. But he forgot the winter when the Gypsy perforce has to cease his roving and shut himself up in his hovel.

*Rostás, the Gypsy Violinist*

**A**S we were walking down one of the crowded streets my two girls gave a whoop and started to run after a man who was entering a shop. Catching him by the coat they swung him round and with many gesticulations pointed at me. The man came up and bowed deferentially. He was a most sinister figure and one who brought back to my mind all the recollections of the Borrovian Gypsy heroes. He was tall of stature, though he walked with bent shoulders and kept his eyes fixed on the ground. His face was walnut colour and his bushy eyebrows gave him a Satanic expression. When he looked at you, his queer opal-coloured eyes shone with a malevolent glint and a deep gash across his forehead gave him an expression of fierceness.

When I spoke to him in Romany he immediately began to fraternize with me. Under his arm he carried a fiddle in a bag and as soon as I uttered the *bashavav* he handed it to me.

Playing in the street in fair-time is not an easy task, for each moment you are liable to be crushed under some cart. As soon as I started off to play "Hullamszó Balaton" and "Lyuk, Lyuk" his eyes brightened, for he was a Hungarian Gypsy. He seized the fiddle from my hands and started a *lassu*. Soon we became excited rivals and a competition took place to show who knew the biggest number of Hungarian melodies: I very soon had to confess myself defeated, and to cover up my deficiencies I played "Emer's Farewell" and the song of the Irish Wheelright, but this would not satisfy Hungarian Gypsies, who are the most notorious chauvinists in the world as far as music is concerned. Any music other than Magyar does not arouse more than a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders from

them. However, at the end of each outburst of fiddle-scraping he thrust the instrument into my hands and willy-nilly I had to saw away to the best of my ability.

It was curious to watch the effect of our music on the solemn-eyed peasant men and women who stood round us gaping with astonishment to see a perfectly normal, fair-haired stranger excitedly fiddling with a disreputable-looking Gypsy. The peasants found it hard to understand that any normal white man should ply the trade of the Gypsy. The cunning Gypsy seized the chance of cheap publicity and probable monetary gain: he therefore encouraged the crowd to approach and as I played he beat time loudly with his feet. As for the ragged Gypsy girls, they fitted about around us like may-flies.

It was a motley assembly: some men who were dressed in the white costume of the field labourers stood there with their scythes; others wore enormous-brimmed straw hats such as are worn by the harvest workers; there were old women laden with jars and baskets of water-melons. On all sides bright-eyed brats of children tumbled in the dust and scampered like cats as we played on and on.

The heat was suffocating: the streams of perspiration rolled down my face on to the fiddle and trickled into the *f* holes; all life seemed to be melting from me as I responded to the dictatorial Rostás. At last he made me understand that our performance might be continued at greater length in a bar near by, and so off we went, followed by some of the crowd, to a dirty, evil-smelling bar where I stood a round of drinks to the friends of Rostás. Other Gypsies came in and swelled our party, and fiddle-playing started again with greater fury of concentration. This time when I played Hungarian tunes some of the others improvised an accompaniment to the solo.

I noticed that as a rule the violinists who accompany the *Primás* do not possess real bows. Any lithe stick suffices and across this they stretch black horsehair, but they keep it very slack so that they can play across the four strings of the fiddle at once and produce a crude harmony.

As usual in all those feasts of music the peasants did



not need much rhythmic stimulus to react. Within five minutes the whole room was trembling beneath the stamp of the dancers. Nowhere in the world is the effect of music more immediate than in these countries. It is as if some god of rhythm entered the bodies of those people and possessed them to the exclusion of every other emotion in life. There is a proverb which says that you can make a peasant drunk on a glass of water and a Gypsy fiddler. This is certainly true of the peasants in Transylvania. The music has the effect of *Katharsis* in the lives of these people. It is the necessary outlet for emotions that would otherwise be starved in the rough work of the earth. All those peasants fraternized with my friend Rostás as long as they were under the influence of the *Deus rhythmicus*, and one gawky, bearded man put his arms affectionately around him as he filled his glass. And yet I imagined to myself the expression of contempt with which he would greet him at other hours of the day when life was normal and the Gypsy was relegated to his position of slave to the Magyar. As for myself, I found the attentions of some of the women rather embarrassing: one eight months gone with child and carrying with difficulty her enormous bulk came up to me and gave me a kiss that resounded like a smack through the bar. Everyone laughed at this naïve expression of pleasure, but I had visions of a dark, scowling husband lurking in wait for me. The young girls were more restrained and kept up an incessant chatter among themselves.

Before I left the café all the Gypsies insisted on my examining and trying their instruments. Pathetic sights they were, those poor Transylvanian fiddles: they had been for many years subjected to every change of weather. Sometimes as the vagabond minstrel played, the sun would beat down like a furnace upon his instrument and melt the varnish; other days the rain poured ceaselessly and the soaked violin croaked out its misery to the world. Gypsies never put their fiddles in cases, but in a shabby old bag, and as they carry it you may see part of the bow protruding. And yet those poor instruments, when touched

by the thyrsus of the god of rhythm, respond as if they possessed in the grain of their wood a particle of that magic which gave to the Cremonas their golden tone. No matter how badly a Gypsy may play, once he becomes excited by the audience to do his best, then he can make his instrument resound with a wild untutored music.

All that he does is the result of intuition and tradition ; the printed page of music is to him a marvel, for he has never learnt to decipher it. When I showed Rostás some music I had in my pocket he looked at it suspiciously as though it were some secret spell. But my wonder was greater than that of Rostás, for I found that his ear was much more perfect than mine : if he heard a melody played twice or three times he would play it perfectly and his companions would forthwith improvise a harmony.

Rostás never allowed a melody to remain in its primitive state : if I sang him an Irish tune he would cock his head on one side and listen gravely ; then he would take up the fiddle and introduce arabesques of the most complicated kind until my poor, simple Irish tune became like a berouged street-girl of southern Europe. It was useless to argue with him about such matters of taste, for he was completely convinced of the superiority of his Tzigan artistry over that of a mere *busnó*. However, I liked Rostás and I determined to go out vagabonding with him.

*Vagabonding with Rostás*

**R**OSTÁS is an aristocrat among Gypsies, in spite of his sinister countenance, and that is the reason I accompanied him on a tramp to the villages near Huedin. There is nothing servile about Rostás : he does not fawn upon you to get money, for he belongs to that superior category of mortals who affect to despise mere material gain.

I have very rarely met a Gypsy whose eyes did not blaze with covetousness when he caught sight of a silver coin. In the villages the traveller, as a rule, is pestered by the Gypsy mendicants who demand charity and curse you all the while under their breath in Romany : in the cafés the Gypsy musicians flaunt the plate beneath your nose after every piece they play.

Not so Rostás ! Never once did he demand money from me when we were on the tramp together, but when he had gathered together his friends he would call the waiter over and would give the order in a lordly manner. When it came to the hour for paying and I would pull out my purse, Rostás would make a solemn, deprecating gesture as though I had committed an impropriety by such an action.

I never omitted to pay the bill in spite of that mute protest of my friend.

Rostás had many points of delicacy and a dignity that is rare in his race. When we used to perform in cafés or in bars he would always pass round the plate himself so as to spare my feelings, and I appreciated this.

In all my wandering with Gypsies I have always made it a rule not to ask for shares in the spoils, and they have invariably respected my motives. I was the stranger and it was a privilege for me to be taken temporarily into the wandering tribes and become a student of their mysteries.

I am sure the ancestors of Rostás must have been those Counts of Little Egypt who wandered through Europe surrounded by slaves to do their bidding. The Gypsy chief was always the strongest and the handsomest of the tribe and he held office by virtue of his magnetic personality. It was such a man who, under the name of Duke Panuel emblazoned his coat of arms on some of the cathedrals of Western Europe. Rostás had a great deal of the arrogance of the Gypsy chief. With me he was calm and watchful : he accepted with great dignity the presents I made him, the meals I paid for, but always with the impression that he was doing me a great favour.

Our conversation was never very consequent, for my knowledge of Transylvanian Romany was limited to certain isolated words describing general things. It was only when we held our fiddles in our hands that communion of spirit was possible. His face did not lead me to expect deep confidences, for it seemed to have a shutter closed down over it except on certain occasions when he became exalted. The scar on his forehead, his flashing eyes, his cynical expression set him apart from the frankly-gay Gypsies I had met in Hungary.

We set out from Huedin one morning at eight o'clock.

Even at that hour the roads were dusty and the sun a furnace. It was all I could do to keep up with the long stride of Rostás, and at last I insisted on a halt when we had walked ten kilometres. The country was bewitchingly beautiful at this time of the year, for the smell of the harvest was in the air and everywhere we saw the fields full of white-robed peasants working. The plain with its fertile crops undulated away into the distant horizon with its blue mountains. Along the roads we met many a cart laden with peasants returning slowly from Huedin : in some cases the men were full of Bacchus and were lurching forward on the seats shouting out songs. At the back of the carts sat girls in costume laughing and cracking jokes with the peasants as they passed by.

A little farther on we came across a band of ragged Gypsies labouring in a field : they were darker than

Rostás and had shaggy, black beards. It was easy to arouse their interest by a few phrases such as "*Shukar rakli*" or "*pi mol.*"

At various places on the way we drank from fresh springs to relieve our thirst, but in spite of all these rests I was a sorry, footsore figure when we arrived at Almás at six-thirty in the evening.

Rostás led me straight to his own house, which was down a lane just at the outskirts of the town. It would be decidedly optimistic to call it a house, for it seemed to have been constructed of all the old pieces of wood and tin that could be found on a scrap-heap. The whole construction looked as if it was just going to crumble in ruins and was only holding itself aloft out of a sentiment of jaunty pride.

There was only one room and no regular chimney to let out the smoke. Inside we found a very ugly old hag whom he presented as his mother, a younger good-looking but very slatternly woman, his wife, and their children whose ages varied from seven to two years. I was fascinated by the appearance of the old hag: she reminded me of the *gule Romni* referred to so often by Dr. Wlislöcki in his book on the Transylvanian Gypsies. She seemed incredibly old and her face was so furrowed by wrinkles that the skin seemed to be in limp strips. Her chin was very prominent and her mouth gaped open with toothless gums. Only her dark eyes recalled to me the fact that Rostás was her son.

When we entered the hovel she was crouching down over the fire stirring a pot. She came up and scrutinized my face most carefully and then she went and said something in Hungarian to Rostás and her daughter-in-law. She approached again and passed her hands over my clothes. Finally Rostás must have reassured her, for she beckoned me to sit down by the fire. Meanwhile the small children stood like statues in the corner and gaped at me as if I had been an apparition.

The wife was a handsome woman of the strong and passionate kind. She was big and well-developed and her face was strongly chiselled like that of an athlete. Her

skin was like beautifully-polished wood with a certain golden quality about it. There was something panther-like in her movements and when she walked she rolled her hips in a way that suggested the Gypsies of Andalucía. Her hair too was striking, owing to its blue-black colour. If Rostás was arrogant in manner his wife was ever so much more imperious and there was an intensity in her gaze that frightened me. She too was a queen in spite of her ragged smock, showing half of one naked breast, and her bare legs.

The supper was not a kingly one. The old hag served up a kind of broth with great tough pieces of gristle in it: it was so tasteless that irresistibly my mind, as I chewed the meat, strayed to thoughts of dog or horse. After the repast Rostás said it was time to go down to some of the cafés and play, and though I was weary and footsore I followed him from one café to another. It was not a good evening for wandering minstrels as there were few peasants about, and I think the earnings of Rostás did not amount to more than a few lei. At last we turned back to the hut, and when we arrived I found that the company had increased. The sister-in-law of Rostás and her husband were seated with the family.

Soon afterwards we all settled down for the night. There were no beds in the hovel and everyone had just to lie on a few skins and straw on the ground. I have slept in more uncomfortable quarters, but I was not prepared for the promiscuousness of our resting-place. The hovel was not more than 18 feet by 12 feet, and in that space a family of eight people had to sleep. I lay in one corner and near me lay the sister-in-law and her husband, then on the other side lay Rostás, his wife, the old mother, and farther away two children were ensconced, while above our heads in a hammock arrangement swung the baby of the family.

The ground was very hard and the skins were smelly. The atmosphere was stifling, and in addition I began to feel the first fierce onslaught of those voracious beasts that haunt the Gypsies. It is curious that they postpone their chief attack until the silent watches of the night when you lie

motionless. Then when you are just slipping off into slumber they start their attack by the slight stinging sensation they inflict. A few minutes later you are like Gulliver in Lilliput—delivered gagged and bound to the executioner. The activity of those beasts is surprising and their intelligence worthy of Swift's Lilliputians, for when you scratch fiercely they lead you to believe that you have annihilated them. For a moment you think you are free and your body tingles gratefully, but then the slight itching starts in some different spot and works up again to a climax of irritation. My neighbours all this time seemed blandly unconscious of the destruction that was taking place: I suppose hundreds of years of acquaintance with those hosts gives immunity.

The room was pitch dark now, for the fire had burnt low. On one side I heard the stentorian snores of the old woman: on the other I heard a low conversation between Rostás and his wife. The whole scene seemed unreal to me: I could not realize that I was sleeping amid Gypsies in Transylvania. Gradually I slipped off into a queer dreamland, where I seemed to wander aimlessly for centuries through dim forests surmounted by queer animals. I was playing a flute and at each note all sorts of queer little green goblins hopped out in front of me. But as soon as I stopped playing they faded away into thin air and I continued my wandering. I did not know how long I had been dreaming, but it seemed centuries when I suddenly awoke with a start, feeling a hand moving over my body. It was no sluggish hand, for it travelled straight towards my inside pockets, as though its owner was quite certain what the quest should be. For a moment I allowed its explorations to continue, then suddenly when it was descending on my purse in my trousers pocket I caught hold of it with a firm grasp and held on tight.

There was a smothered explanation and a suppressed laugh: it was the sister-in-law who evidently thought that her talent for *ustilar pastesas* might be tried with profit upon me.

Poor, misguided girl, if she had only known that when

the *busnó* goes on Gypsy trips he leaves the bulk of his money and valuables under lock and key in the nearest big town, for he is superstitious enough to believe that one should not tempt Providence.

Finding that she had failed, the girl became affectionate and tried to cuddle up against me. She whispered words of invitation and put out her arms and tried to draw me within their embrace. It was an embarrassing moment for me: Love knows no fury like a woman scorned, but there was also the peril of her husband who might be lying awake on her other side.

Even if I had been tempted circumstances required a strict neutrality, and at the risk of playing the part of a rather middle-aged Joseph, I firmly rejected her advances. Perhaps my ideas concerning the jealous nature of Gypsy husbands did not apply to Transylvania. I knew that in Spain ever since the days of Borrow the fidelity of Gypsy wives has been proverbial and *Lacha ye trupos* or corporal chastity is considered the most perfect possession of a woman. Nobody, however, gives the Gypsies of the east of Europe credit for being very chaste. In fact, throughout Roumania we meet an immense number of Gypsy flower-sellers who will also sell their bodies for a few lei. I may relate that the sister-in-law's husband was grey-haired, but he was grim-looking and I was sure he would be a dangerous rival for any inexperienced Don Juan to encounter. After this little *aventure* I found it impossible to sleep in the confined space of the hovel, for the smell of unwashed bodies mingled with the scent of onions and rotten fish seemed at this hour of the night to increase rather than to diminish in intensity.

I got up noiselessly and slipped out of the hut.

Outside, it was fairyland: the moon shone brightly and the sky was still starry, but gradually the ghostly green light of dawn was creeping across the sky and putting out the fairy lamps one by one. There was not a sound anywhere. Occasionally the bark of a dog miles away seemed to bring back to the earth my roving spirit. I started to walk through the country which at this hour in



the queer half-light seemed to be crawling with phantoms. Every tree when it rustled was stirred by some goblin, and I saw shadows hurry across the moonlit road. At this hour just before the dawn the silence became wellnigh unbearable, for all nature seemed to hold back and the heart-beat of the world stopped for the fraction of a second.

There was a sense of preparation as though every living thing drew in its breath so as to salute with a cry of joy the coming of the dawn. I now understand why the Provençals and the Catalans composed their beautiful *aubades* or songs of the dawn under the influence of this magic hour of mystery just before the splendour is about to appear.

As I saw the light increase in brightness and the green tints blush to red, I longed for a band of musicians to salute Aurora in song. Among the Gypsies a red dawning would seem to bode ill if we may believe the Gypsy poem :

“ Full moon, high sea  
Great man thou shalt be ;  
Red dawning, cloudy sky,  
Bloody death shalt thou die.”

The Gypsies still attach supernatural attributes to the moon in Hungary and Roumania. In the latter country there are a host of superstitions connected with Diana, for it is under her light that fairies and witches carry out their revels and they are implacable to anyone who disturbs them when they are dancing in the moonlight. There is even a phrase for a man who fell ill—“ *naiso je na vilnisko Kolo* ”—“ he stepped on a fairy ring.”<sup>1</sup> In Roumania also they tell the sad story of the shepherd boy Stanko, who played on a flute by moonlight and became so absorbed in his playing that he did not heed the Ave Maria bell. He saw a *vila* or fairy sitting on a hedge and she was as fair as could be. She never left him but haunted him awake and asleep. There she was—a white, unearthly spectre, gradually drawing him into the shadow of death by her magic. No magician was able to break

<sup>1</sup> Leland. *Gypsy Sorcery*.

the spell and the poor youth wasted away. Some days he would be found bound to a tree and he said she had beaten him because he would not follow her. At last they found his body in a ditch where he had been drowned.

These were the thoughts that were surging in my mind as I walked along, and the red dawn when it came acted as a beneficent deity who cleans away the vapours and cobwebs of the mind.

*On the Road in Transylvania*

## THE BLIND FLUTE-PLAYER

I WAS glad to dissolve my partnership with Rostás for various reasons. For one thing I soon became wearied of his clan and his hovel life with its filth and sordidness. The main joy of wandering as a minstrel consists in the sensation of complete individual independence. I never felt independent with Rostás, for he was the most dictatorial Gypsy I had ever met and he looked upon me as a kind of white slave whose main reason for existence was to play in such a way that the lei would pour into his cap. I was only too willing to let Rostás and his family have all the money, for I knew that they had many opportunities of relieving me of it by open attack or by guile. I also began to have serious fears for my digestion if I endured any longer the meals prepared by the old witch of a mother. In order to spare myself the scene of parting I disappeared in the middle of the night when everyone in the hovel was asleep, and bivouacked by the side of the road about five miles from Almás. Then when the sun of the following day was high in the heavens I started on my tramp towards Cluj or Kolozsvár, the capital of Transylvania.

For hours I tramped on over the dusty roads, but not a soul did I meet. It is a sad thing to carry a fiddle and not have anybody to listen to your playing. What good is a solitary troubadour if he has no one to listen to his songs? I am sure the troubadours in the Middle Ages did not wander alone, for they would have been the helpless prey of highway robbers or the wild beasts that inhabited the forests. Troubadours composed their songs and *Jongleurs* played their lutes in crowded castle halls before kings and beautiful women: they reclined on tapestries and only tuned their instruments after a

bounteous repast, and sweet red wine was passed to them in goblets from the hands of princes. Odysseus did not tell the stories of his wanderings to the deserted shores but to the crowded halls of rich Alcinous, and as he told the tale he cast his eyes ever and anon to the maidenly Nausicaa. Or else the troubadour forsook the polished society of prince and court for the ale-houses and brothels of the people like Guillem Figiera the tailor's son, or the famous Juan Ruiz of Spain. Among the inn-keepers and the knaves and the roaming soldiery with their whores and panders he would tune his fiddle and tell the public a story of fantastic deeds that happened long ago. Then the host would load the tables with beakers of wine : the old Gypsy witch would point a moral to his tale and the dancing-girl, the latest sweeting of the minstrel, would dance her rhythm into the ears of the merry company. As I walked along my mind wandered to thoughts of Demetrius Kármán, the renowned Gypsy minstrel of sixteenth-century Hungary : he would not be wandering alone as I am through the wilds of Transylvania with not even a dog or cat to cast a word at. No, you would find him along the crowded roads that led to some shrine of pilgrimage, or else on the high road to Buda among princes, peasants, priests and buffoons. If he had seen me grimy and footsore with my instrument under my arm, he would stop me and say :—

DEMETRIUS KÁRMÁN : " Whither away, brother ? Why so glum ? "

MYSELF : " Alas, stranger, I am a poor fiddler and I have been walking for hours without meeting a soul who wants a tune. "

DEMETRIUS KÁRMÁN : " Why, brother, you are too sad a vagabond—I should have heard you laugh a mile off and watched a herd of wenches at your heels footing the dance. In my days when I wandered through Hungary I never went alone : there was never a peasant's hovel that did not give me a poem or a song and my laughter filled up the empty spaces. At every cross-roads you would see the dancers halt and look to my coming, and when they saw my portly form ambling over the plain

they would clap their hands and the blind fiddler would begin to thrum."

MYSELF : " Ah, but nowadays the people have lost their merriment and the vagabond is distrusted. The country is no longer a place of joy for the peasant, but only a working ground. No longer does he garner his harvest to the sound of songs and dances. He is grim and holds his face close to the grindstone. Then when his toil is over he dashes off to the nearest city and plunges into his Dionysiac frenzy there."

DEMETRIUS KÁRMÁN : " Who knows but the old days may come again when the travelling will be on foot and when everyone will realize that the only happy one is the vagabond. For the vagabond will see beauty in every piece of road and every track across the plain. The rustling trees will be music to his ears, for through them he hears a fairy tune : the passes through the mountains will be full of mystery, for on all sides he will see queer shapes and hear the tramp of mounted men in pursuit. Life will be full of joy at one moment and full of melancholy the next and every hour will tell its own tale."

The thoughts of Demetrius Kármán made me reflect on my own wandering.

When I first started out I found the ways long : my feet were sore and the heat exhausted me ; my thoughts were still attached to my life of conventionality and I felt that though I had put on the costume of a vagabond I had not yet become one. It was only by calling repeatedly on my vagabond personality that it came to me. And as soon as it came my whole attitude towards life began to change : I felt light-hearted and the road became full of interest. I had the sense of being absolutely free from the anxieties of life, of having sloughed off my old soul and finding a new one full of wonder like a child's.

To the wanderer there is no such thing as time. I had taken the precaution of leaving my watch behind in Italy, more, I must say, as a precaution against Gypsy-thieving, but never once in seven weeks did I feel its want because there was no need to do anything on time. When you

wander on foot from Huedin to Cluj and Cluj to Bucharest it does not matter when you arrive. If night falls and you are far from a town you have only to go up and knock at a farm-house and the peasant will give you a bed or a corner in the barn to sleep in until morning.

Money is a disadvantage to the wanderer, for it lays him open to the peril of being robbed either directly or indirectly. When you meet other vagabonds on the roads or in the inns if they think you have any money they will impose on you and will cringe and fawn until you stand the round. If they see that you are as poor as they are they will share their tiny coin with you and will fraternize. In such circumstances the vagabonds become a brotherhood of the road and the tinker or Gypsy will be more generous than the fat bourgeois who pays all his subscriptions to the local charities.

All you need for the brotherhood of the road is a tiny spark of talent. You need to have some little individual trait of originality: if you can sing a song, juggle, play a tune on the fiddle, read fortunes from the Tarot cards, tell fairy stories or explain magic charms, you will be welcome in any circle. The landlord of the inn is a mean fellow and most choleric: he would chase you away with foul oaths if you asked him for charity, and he would set his *confrère* the local policeman on your track. But if you enter the bar and start giving your little performance so that the rough men of the fields come up around you, then you will observe his eye brightening. He will come over dressed in his white apron and casually throw a glance at what you are doing, then he will bring a fresh *stiklă* of wine and if the guests give you a drink, who knows but he will stand you one himself and a free meal into the bargain.

Walking alone is sad at times, but once you can get into your wanderer personality there is immense joy in conversing with yourself as you walk along.

The day was hot and the fields I walked through were parched, but I felt like the Barber's Sixth Brother and in my mind I constructed a long tale.

I imagined I was living in the past when there were

castles of nobles all over Transylvania : I was a Gypsy and I had been a serf attached to the estate of a Hungarian Baron—one of the poor *robi*, who until the year 1852, when they won their liberty, were treated as the lowest of slaves. I had escaped from my serfdom because an old woman had taught me the traditional airs of the Gypsies, and the daughter of a noble hearing me one day ordered me to be liberated. From castle to castle I wandered, driving away the boredom of the fair lords and ladies in time of peace and inspiring them to action in time of war. When I met Gypsy tribes I would play for them what is said to be the everlasting Gypsy lament for the day of Nagy Ida.

On a certain day in 1557 when the Hungarian troops under Perényi were in battle, the Gypsy contingent was called on to defend the fortress of Nagy Ida in Transylvania and this they did with such success as to rout the invading force. Elated by their success and with the characteristic boastfulness of the Gypsies they shouted at the retreating force : " Begone, ye dogs, with your tails between your legs : if we had not just come to the end of our ammunition you would have suffered even greater annihilation at our hands." The enemy, hearing this, turned round and attacked again, this time capturing the munitionless fort and putting to the sword every Gypsy within the walls. To commemorate this sad defeat the Gypsy musicians composed a lament to be sung on the anniversary of the day whenever they were together far from the *busnó*, and it was this tune that I played for the old men as they rocked themselves to and fro before their tents.

After awaking from my tale I walked wearily onwards and came to a small wood where I determined to rest for a while near a little stream which babbled out of a hill.

Just then I heard the sound of flute-playing. I was still day-dreaming and the sound of the flute seemed to come from an invisible player, far off and yet near. Its voice was unreal as though it had floated down from the clouds. At one moment the long wailing note prolonged itself into infinity, and then suddenly there would be a rush of quick

notes leading up to a long pause. Then the player would start afresh and lead up to the same climax and die down to a whisper again.

After a few moments' search I suddenly discovered a man seated on a hillock playing one of those Roumanian shepherds' flutes called the *coval* : he was dressed in ragged white baggy trousers and short green coat and wore no hat. For a while he would play a queer wild melody with many little trills, ever increasing in volume and complexity like the song of the nightingale. Then at the end of a verse he would pause and recite aloud to himself a Latin prayer with the utmost devotion before he began the next verse of his tune. When I went near him I found that he was totally blind and beside him lay the stick which guided his uncertain footsteps, and the plate for alms. The effect of the melody of the song on me was indescribable : I could not tear myself away from the fascination of that instrument which sounded to my ears as sadly significant as the piper on the ramparts in the third act of *Tristan and Isolde*. For over an hour I waited and heard him play continuously verse after verse of many songs, but always with his Latin prayer intercalated. Here was the living embodiment of the *jongleur*, of the blind minstrel who used to play to Alfonso the sage when he went on the pilgrimage to Saint James of Compostela. No sound could remind one more of the queer fascination which Transylvania exerts on the traveller as though in that country we heard continually the faint echoes of past deeds in the far-off days when Demetrius Kármán sang or when Rákoczi led his troops to battle. It is only occasionally that we may feel such emotion. If I were to write down coldly the melody played by the blind man it would seem insignificant to the musician, for its magic came to me over the balmy air in that wood, accompanied by the soft murmur of the brook near by. It is impossible to recapture that sudden emotion, for like the tune itself it flitted away for ever, leaving as it passed only a slight fragrance in the soul. How much in music is not due to this sudden awakening of emotion aroused by so many causes ? In my case it was the setting



that affected me as much as the music. The blind player by his music made me think of Richard Cœur de Lion in his prison cell answering the song of the minstrel outside : of " magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn." From the germ of melody it was possible to build up a picture that brought the past and the present together as though Time were abolished.

It is thus that great music may be created. A composer hears in his mind a beautiful melody which is an echo of some folk-tune hallowed by time. The little germ of melody excites him by its beauty and already in his fancy he watches it expand into a Symphony as though by magic power he was constructing in a moment an Aladdin's palace of sound. Then after his completed creation has flashed before his inward eye he starts with the devoted industry of the artist to construct little by little his edifice until in the end it will be an earthly copy of the ideal heard in his fancy. It is thus that I imagine Beethoven working at his symphonies and quartets, drawing from all sources the little melodies on which he based mighty works. And so also Schubert who could never walk arm in arm with his noisy companions through the streets of Vienna without catching in his retentive ear some street song or fragment of melody which would afterwards appear in his works.

After listening to the blind man for an hour I went up and spoke some words to him in broken Roumanian. He told me in queer halting speech that he was waiting there until his wife should come to lead him on to the nearest village where he could get some food. He had always been blind as long as he could remember and he did not mind the affliction because he saw beautiful things with his inner eye. God had given him this punishment, but He had left him the enjoyment of his acute sense of hearing.

After he had spoken to me a while he seemed to fall into a *rêverie* and he began to mutter Latin prayers to himself. I left him praying, and as I moved away I saw a figure approaching. It was the wife of the blind man, for she went up to him and led him onwards down the road.

Musing on what the blind man had said I could not help

thinking of Synge's play, the *Well of the Saints*, with its two blind beggars, Martin and Mary Doul. Though they had no eyes they saw life as a gorgeous pattern of many colours, and in that pattern they found themselves part of the beauty. Then when the saint granted them their sight they saw what a poor contrast the reality was in comparison to the world of their fantasy. Martin was a dirty old tramp, and Mary without a tooth in her head was the personification of ugliness. Was it a wonder that Martin eventually cast away the can containing the holy water for the restoration of sight? Of what good is reality when fantasy can weave such a web of beauty? Sight is not all important for those who have the poetic inner eye which is the bliss of solitude. I am sure my blind flute-player saw a more beautiful world than I did, for there was nothing to distract him from contemplation. He derived his knowledge of the beauties of nature from sounds. For him the rustling of the trees in that wood meant more than it did to me, for it brought him fairy music: the sounds of the streams bubbling over the rocks and the murmuring of insects in the heat of the sun would tell their tale. And in addition to the sense of hearing he would find his sense of smell the stronger. The scent of the pines, the smell of the new-cut hay, the fragrance of wild flowers would be a solace to him and a consolation. It is no wonder that all over ancient Europe the blind man was the recognized source of folk-lore and music, and it was with good reason that the King of Rhapsodists was always represented as a blind poet.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *Cluj or Kolozsvár*

#### HUNGARIAN-ROUMANIAN POINT COUNTER-POINT

THERE is an air of pride about Cluj: it stands surrounded by its mountains as a strong bulwark in Transylvania and it bears witness to countless wars waged between East and West. And yet Cluj was the birthplace of the peace-loving Matthias Corvinus, the Hungarian king of the Renaissance period who brought so much of the beauty and art of Italy to his country. It was Matthias Corvinus who caused the erection of Italian galleries and churches throughout Hungary. It is in Cluj also that we may find the pathetic relics of Lajos Kossuth, the great patriot who lived in exile until 1894.

Nowadays Cluj has changed, for it is no longer predominantly Magyar. Instead of being called Kolozsvár, as it was in the past, it has changed its name to the Roumanian Cluj, and Roumanian it is becoming under the ægis of its new rulers. Some day it will be interesting to read the serene and unprejudiced history of Transylvania, written by a man who can show the antithesis between the Hungarian and Roumanian mind. At present it is very difficult for the stranger to understand the situation clearly, for he is torn this way and that by the conflicting partisans. Both sides oppose one another and fire off their propagandist press as if it were a machine-gun. In the confusion of the fight every attempt to reach the truth is looked upon with suspicion. The city possesses two distinct societies, one Hungarian and the other Roumanian, and hardly a member of either knows anyone of the opposite faction. The Magyar noble families live in sad retirement like the *émigrés* of France in the Napoleonic times and cry out

against the sad change that has come over their lives. Before the War of 1914 they were a ruling race and their privileges were feudal. Now, after the conflict, their country has been drawn and quartered: one part given to this nation, another given to that, and their richest province, Transylvania, lies in the power of the hated enemy. Those who lived through the Great War, making sacrifice after sacrifice for their country, losing fathers and sons and homesteads, hoped that when peace came to the world it would give them a land fit for heroes. But the Peace Treaty was a greater misfortune than the four years' war, for by a stroke of the pen the land they had fought for was delivered over to the enemy. The plebiscite after the War gave Transylvania to the Roumanians, and now the government in Bucharest is striving to accomplish in a few years a process which normally takes fifty years. It has undertaken the task of making Transylvania Roumanian in spirit, and to attain this end has drafted in many officials from the old country to fill the chief positions. Cluj, the capital of Transylvania, is the centre of this work of reconstruction with its new university, its national theatre and its archæological museum.

In associating with the two sides in the city I found my sympathies veering round, now to the Hungarian side, now to the Roumanian. The Hungarians of Kolozsvár are the most charming people in Europe and nobody can converse with them without pitying their plight. I had known one of them in Rome, a sculptor called Gabriel Vago who now happened to be in his home town, and through his kind offices I became acquainted with several noble families. I spent long evenings in beautiful gardens on the outskirts of the city, when conversation would turn to the sad misfortunes of Transylvania. My hostess, an oldish lady, frail and delicate, with the traces of deep suffering on her face, would tell me of terrible events that had taken place, of pledges that had been broken, of treachery and double-dealing. Then journalists of the Hungarian papers in Cluj would add to the stories until my head felt burdened with the sorrows of the people.

With my ears ringing with the sorrows of the Magyars I would go down the street to the house of a Roumanian friend, a poet who is an official of the government, and he would start a tirade against the minorities in Transylvania. He would enlarge on the terrible abuses of Magyar rule, to which the Roumanians had submitted for hundreds of years. "It would be impossible to do as much harm to the Magyars as they have done us. Why, we Roumanians were no better treated than slaves, and when our rulers wanted to humble us particularly they would call us Wallachians. It was time that the modern world put an end to the feudal oppression of the Magyar rule." My friend then went on to explain that Roumania was the most tolerant country in the world, in spite of all the instances I had heard from my Magyar friends to the contrary. According to him, there was absolutely no persecution of Magyars—"Why, the minorities here are better treated than anywhere else in the world," he said. He told me that there was a Magyar theatre in Cluj playing to full houses, whereas in the old Magyar days it was always empty. He assured me that no piece was ever stopped on account of its political opinions, for the government considered that tolerance was necessary. This tolerance was shown especially in the educational policy, which allowed Magyar schools to exist side by side with the Roumanian, and no attempt was ever made to prevent the Magyar population from having their own newspapers in their own language. He told me that in the last nine years the Roumanian penetration of Transylvania had been very far-reaching, and as he took leave of me he said jocularly: "You now see, sir, that there is no possibility of saying that Transylvania is Hungarian." I left his house in much greater perplexity than when I had entered it. My deep love for the Hungarians could not blind me against the Roumanians, who had shown me such kindness in my wandering. Tolerance is the best policy and, as far as I could judge, the Roumanians displayed it in their treatment of the minority. The Magyar theatre, which I visited on several occasions, was an interesting illustration

of what may be done by a people that is essentially dramatic. The plays were well staged and the acting was excellent. Operas as well as plays are performed, and one night the company gave us a music drama based on folk-lore. On this occasion I visited the theatre as the guest of Monsieur Emil Isac, the Government Inspector of Theatres and Fine Arts in Transylvania. Mr. Isac, who is a well-known Roumanian man of letters, has done a great deal to help artistic enterprise in this city, and I must say that his methods of directing the exceedingly complex situation seem above praise. From him I learnt of many schemes for the betterment of conditions in Transylvania, and it was through his kindness that I was able to visit the Art Museums and private collections.

It is in the University of Cluj that the Roumanians have put their trust as a cultural force in the country. Though newly-equipped it has already attracted attention among European scholars, and the credit for its fame must be due in large measure to such international scholars as Professor Jorga and Professor Bogdan, who have upheld the dignity of Roumanian letters. Not only is Cluj the University town of the country, but it is also the place where the language is sifted. I visited an institute organized in connection with the Roumanian Academy where the Dictionary of the language is compiled by the principal philologists. They are in continual touch with various teachers throughout the country who assist them in preparing a phonetic map of the language. A teacher goes to a village and carries with him a *questionnaire* concerning certain words. He then asks the peasants and the tramps for various terms connected with their life and pursuits. They tell him the names used in their dialects—the parts of a house, of a plough, of a horse—and he writes them into the *questionnaire*. In this way it has been possible to gather together immense philological and folk-lore material which will be of the greatest assistance to scholars. The musicians here have not been laggards, for I met many of them on my wanderings armed with phonographs, ready to record the folk-songs as sung and played by peasant or Gypsy in

the various villages. It will thus be seen that Roumania is doing her best to bring the cultural organization of Transylvania up to date ; great pride is taken in the work of reconstruction, and in a few years a city like Cluj will be one of the intellectual centres of Eastern Europe. The Roumanians of Cluj are as tolerant in manner as they are in their laws and it is impossible not to be charmed by them. It would be difficult for me to repay in words of gratitude the treatment I received from professors of the University and officials of the city : the stranger soon after he has set foot within the city becomes a favoured guest. Hospitality, like that of Hungary and Spain, is large-hearted, and I had occasion to put it to the test, for when I arrived in Cluj I was financially on my last legs. Out in the wilds near Huedin and Almás it was easy to live without money, for the food was cheap and it was always possible to find a bed in a barn. In Cluj life was expensive and I had to live up to the status of a gentleman once more. After the second day of my stay I spent my last twenty-lei note on a bottle of beer, and then I had to meditate deeply. To comfort me I had in my pocket a cheque-book on the Bank of Ireland, but the Cluj officials would not cash me a cheque unless it was guaranteed by somebody who knew me. What was a wanderer to do ? My first thought was to go to the British Consul in Cluj and ask him to guarantee my signature to a cheque for £10, but I soon found that the modern consul is much more suspicious than his ancestors. He refused to see me or to help me in any way and I was left cold and forlorn on the steps of the consulate. I appealed to Zeus, God of the Hearth, for protection, and I had not far to wander helpless in this land, for a Roumanian chance acquaintance immediately initialled my cheque and thus performed the service which had been refused by my compatriot. Nobody need ever fear that he will find himself stranded some day in either Hungary or Roumania : the people are too friendly to foreigners ever to permit such a thing. In no part of the world does the letter of introduction work such miracles ; chance acquaintanceships that you make in third-class

carriages lead to a series of friendships. When I arrived in Cluj it was not long before I became the guest of several charming families. Everything in this city predisposes the stranger in its favour. The great square with its old-world air reminded me of the Plaza Mayor at Salamanca, and I expected to see a patriarchal Unamuno seated at the table of the Café New York with his friends and satellites. There is just enough modern life to make you feel how alive this centre of the country is, without leading your thoughts away from Matthias Corvinus, Gabriel Bethlen and Stephen Bocskai. The majestic church, whose foundations were laid in the days of Pope Boniface in the fifteenth century, stands there, a witness to the changing fortunes of history—at one moment Lutheran, at another Catholic, always surrounded by the turmoil of the battles which took place in Transylvania. In this city we may study the clash of nationalities which gives to the whole province its characteristic appearance. Here are Hungarians, Roumanians, Saxons, Szekels, Jews and Gypsies, all of them conscious of their own individual qualities but living at peace with one another. The atmosphere of the city is calm and serene: nobody hurries, for life has not been modernized in the American fashion. The streets are wide, and at all hours of the day I saw couples sauntering lazily along enjoying the sunlight. At certain hours of the day the square is invaded by crowds of students from the University, and in the evening the loungers throng the large Café New York for the *apéritif*. Among the masses of smart men and pretty girls dressed in thin light costumes we see shaggy peasants from the mountains that surround the city. In the morning down one side of the square we discover a fruit and flower market full of life and colour. Such chattering of women I have never heard: every one of the sellers was a Gypsy, and a study worthy of Jacques Callot. Some of them were as ugly as sin, with screwed-up wrinkled faces, but there was always the merry sparkling eye to beckon you on. One great fat Gypsy woman called Rosa fascinated me by her size. She was selling fruit to some ladies and at the same time arguing violently with a



group of street arabs who were standing by. After buying some flowers from her and saying a few words of Romany she became very talkative. She told me that she and some of her sisters worked in the market-place, and the rest of the family were wooden-spoon makers living on the outskirts of the city in a place called the "Street of the Spoons." In Cluj there are two groups of Gypsies—the musicians, who are exclusive and live together, and the humble working Gypsies, who are not far removed from nomads. She also told me that one of the commonest professions for Gypsy women here was to be a mason. "Two of my sisters are masons," she said, "and you should see them carry the weights on their shoulders." Before I left her she made me promise that I would go to visit the "Street of the Spoons" and hear her mother tell my fortune: "She is a *gule romni* and you will hear wonderful stories from her." Later on in the day I visited some of the hovels inhabited by the Gypsy artisans who live in another part of the city. It was sundown and all the families were at home; as we approached we were greeted by a chorus of screaming children and barking dogs. A crowd of about thirty gathered around me and began to ask embarrassing questions in Roumanian and Hungarian. When I spoke Romany, some women came up and started to make obscene jokes in the real Gypsy manner. I heard as in a haze all the words such as *lubnyi*, *minch* and *car* with their usual embellishments. "Come here, pretty gentleman," said a rollicking girl, "I want to put my arms round you and sleep the whole night with you." "Nay, girl," replied another, "he would not let you sleep; look at his eyes: he's as fresh as young bull." They all gave me the impression of being irresponsible children of the earth. Near them was seated a group of men playing cards and I determined to take a photograph. As soon as the women saw me take out the camera there was a shout of glee and many tried to get into the picture. The effect was very different on the card-players: two of them cursed roundly and turned their backs. One of them suddenly jumped up and rushed at me. Before I could get out of the way

he had struck me a resounding blow on the side of the head. Though I was taken by surprise I immediately grappled with the furious fellow, who seemed to be possessed by a hundred devils. Luckily his companions in a twinkling of an eye caught him by both arms and held him back, otherwise I should have had a bad time, for wrestling with infuriated Gypsies is not my profession. I again remembered the words of advice given to me by the Gypsy connoisseur—"No matter what insult the Gypsies inflict upon you, never answer back: if they hit you, turn the other cheek." The friends of my aggressor apologized to me and explained that he had been losing at cards and my arrival with the camera had seemed to him to bring bad luck. "You know," they said, "that instrument has the evil eye." To show that there was no ill feeling, I asked the four men and some of the women to have a drink of *pálinka* in a tavern near by. Instead of rough looks there were only smiles and, as usual, the Bacchanalian element soon dominated every other emotion.

When I walked back through the city it was already dusk: here and there the street-lamps twinkled, illuminating venerable arches, gabled houses and the remains of ancient palaces. I stopped for a few moments to rest in a quiet garden full of fragrant flowers. Here all was peace: the birds nested on the boughs of the trees or in the battlements of a ruined tower. The city seemed to sleep, though it was early evening and the only sound was the distant tolling of a bell. Nowhere in my wanderings through Hungary had I met such an ideal city for the contemplative traveller. Here might be the Oxford of the East of Europe, with its students and its traditional buildings. I thought of the history of Transylvania, which is symbolized by this city, the Kolozsvár of the Magyars. In the far-off days of the Romans, Transylvania was the great source of wealth, for in the sands of its rivers was found the gold which adorned the palace of the Empress of Rome, and when Attila swept over Europe with his Huns he opened the way of pillage and rapine for countless succeeding hordes. We can visualize the history of Transylvania from the days

when Csaba left his Szekels to guard the frontier of Europe until the time when Turkish Pashas held all the country up to Buda under the sway of the Sublime Porte. During the years when Hungary was ravaged by fierce soldiery, Kolozsvár was the centre of refuge from Turkish atrocities. Here there was a cultured and refined society versed in the arts of Italy and Germany and in addition a sense of solidarity based on the union between Magyar, Szekel and Saxon. It was Transylvania that produced one of the noblest figures of Hungarian history—Hunyádi János, the son of Sigismund and the Wallach maiden, Elizabeth Mar-sinai. The story of the birth of Hunyadi reads like that of Siegfried in the Nibelung Cycle. Sigismund the monarch fell in love with the beautiful Wallach peasant maid, and lived with her without disclosing his rank. When he went off to the wars he gave her a ring, telling her that when she should be delivered of a child she should carry the ring to the King at Buda who would treat her and the child with kindness. A year later when the woman was plodding her way towards Buda with her child she lay down to sleep one day under a tree. The child meanwhile was playing with the ring which hung round his neck when a crow swooped down and carried it off. Fortunately Elizabeth's brother, who was with her, saw the crow fly off with its prize and brought it to earth with his bow and arrow. The King recognized his offspring, and so Hunyadi was afterwards made lord of a great part of Transylvania. He became the great leader of the Magyar forces and set on his coat of arms the image of the crow and the ring to commemorate the legend.

Transylvania has always been separate from Hungary in its traditions, though the Magyars were in the ascendancy ; it has always been a centre of toleration and religious liberty in comparison to other parts of the country. But this toleration only extended to the Magyars, Saxons and Szekels. The Wallachs were considered a subject race, for they were not of noble blood according to their masters. And now after centuries of Magyar rule the country has returned to its original rulers the Roumanians, the descend-

ants of the Dacians who were incorporated in Trajan's Empire. It will be instructive to watch the effect of the Roumanian government's policy in the next ten years. I know of no more interesting struggle than that which is taking place in Transylvania between the culture of the Magyars and the culture of the Roumanians. What will happen to Cluj in our modern age? Will it go the way of so many old European cities that have had to accept modern Progress?

I now began to feel the chill breeze of the night and the enchantment of the fairy garden was over. As I walked down the narrow path by the Tower I heard a man's voice singing one of the melancholy *doinas* of the Roumanian peasant. The music with its strange cadence, its florid trills, its lonely sadness, brought my thoughts back hundreds of years to the early Wallachian troubadours who wandered through the land carrying with them the traditional song of Byzantium, the heir of ancient Greece.

## CHAPTER XXV

### *Bohemians not Gypsies*

#### A ROUMANIAN SYMPOSIUM

“**T**HEY are more sociable in Roumania than we are in Northern Europe,” said I to myself as I went to meet my friend, Professor Grimm. Though I had arrived two days before at Cluj an unknown wanderer carrying a rucksack and a fiddle, to-day I was a member of the small *cénacle* of artists and intellectuals in the city. This sudden friendly urbanity is characteristic of Roumania and we meet it everywhere. I have travelled in our country for a whole day in a railway compartment with several strangers, but not once was I able to advance beyond the barrage of the opposing newspapers. The Briton keeps to himself and does not expand with strangers ; in fact, if a Briton on a train journey does expand we immediately think he is a card-sharper or a confidence trickster. In Roumania everyone is communicative and I owed many delightful days spent in manor houses and farms to chance encounters on trains or on the road.

One of the first people I met in Cluj was Professor Grimm, and it was natural that I should meet him first. He is a distinguished Professor of English in the University : his classes are attended by students eager to obtain a deep knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon mind ; and he is not merely pedagogic, for he has also translated into Roumanian some of the English classics. But there is another side to Professor Grimm’s character : he is a Bohemian. First of all let me explain the term Bohemian. In the English world we pronounce the word with varying stress. If we are one of the middle-class, respectable citizens who wear bowlers, hard collars, dickies, spats and carry an umbrella, we underline the word in a curious way, stopping after the

syllable Bo and aspirating the h in the second—Bo-Hemian. The word thus pronounced becomes invested with a certain touch of scorn. I have known perfectly normal men puff their faces out all red and bulge their eyes as they said it, for it calls up in their mind queer visions of artistic high-brow talk above their heads, long-haired men, short-haired women and uneasy vices. If, on the other hand, we belong to the "arty" set we pronounce the word quickly, gliding over the syllables, and our eyes sparkle, because to us Bohemia calls up a vision of the Paris Latin Quarter which we try hard to create in London, but which obstinately refuses to adapt itself to Chelsea or St. John's Wood. Bohemia to such amongst us means artificial conversation raised to the level of rhythmic prose; it means denunciation of the past and glorification of the present. "Let us worship the actual," the devotees cry, "and discover the tiniest nuance in a pulsating second of vigorous life." As for long-haired men—let us be so in a city where the subways are crowded with bald-headed men whose destination is the City. Let us be short-haired women, put blue paint beneath our eyes, redden our lips, wear short skirts, be mannish, and communists, for then people will say—"Look, there is one of the Bohemians: she is a friend of Lélie the opium smoker and they say she goes in for very exotic vices." Who is the true Bohemian? He is a very simple person who can adapt himself to his surroundings because he possesses plasticity. If he is among bowler-hatted, hard-collared, hard-thinking men he can play up to them though keeping all the time within himself an ironic gravity. If he is talking to a gushing girl art student who wears cubist frocks and gives readings of her poems through a megaphone, he can appear interested, though he knows that her ticket of entry to Bohemia is a forgery. When he is with Gypsies, beggars, dancing-girls, actors or jugglers, he can become one of them and he always travels cheaply, for to him every door in Europe is open. Professor Grimm at once became my ideal Bohemian. The word, however, is only a more modern synonym for the old, much-abused, long-suffering word "gentleman."

When Democracy follows Count Keyserling's advice and becomes an aristocracy of the whole people then such people as Professor Grimm will be kings.

Why do Bohemians wear beards? I never thought of the question until I saw Professor Grimm. He wears a neatly trimmed foreign beard which gives a semi-diabolical expression to his keen face. Beards confer distinction upon Bohemians because they set up an antithesis to the hard facial type of dominant races which has generally been clean-shaven. Julius Cæsar was bald and clean-shaven, so too was Augustus: the Romans dominated the world by their hard, clean-shaven mouths. In later days England took on the tradition and latterly there have been few Cabinet Ministers who were not clean-shaven. Of course the Labour Party being an advocate of Bohemianism may change the fashion. And Continental Europe which used to love the bearded and moustachioed man brings forth a Mussolini who leads us back to the Roman type. Professor Grimm belongs to the beard-wearers who are in revolt against the dominating man of affairs. He looks like a Russian, but there is a merry twinkle in his eyes instead of the steely hardness of the Muscovite. I knew at once that he had been brought up in the old quartier latin near the "Chat Noir" at the time when Donnay, Lavedan and Portoriche were writing successful plays and when Debussy was revolutionizing French music. But Professor Grimm had more qualities in his character than those acquired in the cosmopolitan world of the "Chat Noir" or even the "Ronde" in Montparnasse. He has a touch of Teutonic drollery about him, perhaps due to his name. I have heard him tell Roumanian fairy stories with the droll fantasy of his German namesake, and on other occasions I have seen him possessed by the orgiastic spirit of the Russians. And after all this he is a Roumanian and so bound to feel in addition the influences of all the Eastern peoples I have not mentioned. He asked me no questions about my travels, for that would be un-Bohemian. If he had done so I should have had to weary my brain inventing a fantastic story that would satisfy his critical sense of what

a wanderer should do, whereas I was conscious of being too much of a hard-collared, bowler-hatted individual for a man who had so many strings to his bow. "My fiddle has only four strings and you play on sixteen," I said to him as he ordered a glass of *Tuica* for me in a tiny booth in Cluj Square. *Tuica* is the classical drink of Roumania and resembles the *Slivovitz* which is given in Yugoslavia. It is made from plums and makes a very agreeable *apéritif*. In our little *bodega* according to rigid custom all the Bohemians of the city gather at noon, and there are not many of them, barely half a dozen, for what is the good of Bohemia if it is not select? Bohemia should exist in a country as the Republic of San Marino does in Italy—guaranteed by the larger Power but preserving its sentimental independence and individuality. One very good custom I observed among my *Tuica* drinkers: the first day a stranger is introduced he is given a drink at the expense of the Club, but ever afterwards he pays for his own. This custom, which is also true of Spanish *tertulias*, is less expensive than our habit of standing a round of drinks in turn, and truer to the Bohemian spirit. Among our band were several University professors; one of them called Teodorescu is one of the best-known archæologists of the country. He was a small, wiry little man full of anecdotes and capping everything with a folk-song. Then there was an old man with white hair and red face, a former member of Parliament for Transylvania. He was a celebrated lawyer called Amos Frăncu, known throughout Roumania as a fierce radical. I have rarely met a more Voltairian old man: his humour was full of maliciousness and he loved to show up shams. He had lived through many European crises, relishing the turns of the wheel of fortune, and he was a great admirer of the fights for nationality. He told me that he had known Parnell, and had received several letters from the great leader at the time of political struggle. Another interesting member of our *cénacle* was a colossally tall Roumanian painter called Negosanu; he was younger than the rest and preserved a certain innocent and *bon enfant* air that concealed his



intensely unconventional Bohemianism. The rest used to take it in turns to pull Negosanu's leg, and he, I must say, did his best to pull mine. If Grimm was the dashing D'Artagnan of the company, Amos Frăncu with his subtle wit must have been the Abbé Aramis, while incontestably the colossus Negosanu was the bluff Porthos. Negosanu had a complex about women. He told me that he had been married three times, to an Italian, a Turk and a Roumanian, and he thought he was going to become engaged for the fourth time. Grimm and the others, however, laughed and told me not to pay any attention to his statements, for he was, they said, "a great liar." For lunch we all adjourned to a very select little restaurant on the outskirts of the city called the "Coroană." Here from time immemorial the artists have had their reserved table in an inner room and here it was possible to become as Dionysiac as circumstances permitted. Our party now had grown by the addition of two actresses from the Roumanian National Theatre, Athena Dimitrescu and Nunuța Hodos. The former is the principal Tragic and the latter the principal Comic heroine of the theatre. Both girls seemed to live their life off the stage according to the parts they played on it. Athena was a beautiful, tall girl with great Juno eyes and the languid expression of Marguerite Gautier. Every action was reduced to slow motion as though she were a Wagnerian heroine. I felt irresistibly impelled to pass the wine beaker, for I wanted to awaken the devil in her if possible. Her voice was rich and resonant and to my un-Roumanian ears it sounded as if she spoke Racine all the time. After a few glasses of wine she revived and became more natural, but without losing altogether her character of tragic heroine. The other girl, Nunuța, was the opposite: she was small and with a tendency to chubbiness: she too had beautiful dark eyes, but they sparkled as though they were lit by electricity. Her actions were brusque, her laugh was loud and there was a great deal of the devil in her, for she had more temperament than Athena. Both girls were types of Roumanian beauty that I met again and again in my

travels. The stage by giving them so many national parts to play had unconsciously made them into symbols of Roumanian womanhood. Life on the Roumanian stage, according to them, was modelled on the *Théâtre Français* in accordance with the general policy of the country which is directed towards Paris. At present there was not much good Roumanian original drama being written, but the plays of Caragiale, such as *Nepăsta*, deserved to be translated and played in foreign countries. Athena Dimitrescu told me that the Roumanian government does a great deal for the National Theatre in Transylvania by its appointment of an Inspector of Theatres, for by these means good dramatic work is carried on all over the country and great plays chosen for the repertoire.

As dinner progressed the party became gayer and gayer. Above our heads was a little bookcase in the wall which had been instituted by Grimm and his companions. They called it the "Library of Folly" because it contained every piece of humorous frivolity they were able to collect in their peregrinations. Any mad thought, any little *vers libertin*, any amusing letter or puzzle was sure to find its way into the "Library of Folly," and later on the little books containing the writings would be glossed in the margin by the satiric Grimm, who possessed the power of a Sterne in twisting and turning the *double entendre*. The Roumanians impressed me very forcibly by their skill in repartee. At table with these companions I heard again and again epigrams that would have disgraced no Byzantine Greeks of the best period. I felt all the time that my only chance to keep up the good name of Ireland abroad for wit was somehow or other to spirit back from the Elysian Fields the shadowy form of the late Provost of Trinity College, Dr. Mahaffy. As I sat with them I began to see the folly of believing the well-worn tag that the Roumanians are the descendants from the Romans of the province of Dacia and that their spirit is Latin. "There is nothing Roman or Latin about this spirit," said I to myself as I heard Teodorescu improvise couplets on a girl's name, "unless perhaps it is Petronius." Everything about those men is

Greek or rather Byzantine, even their French *esprit*. As Keyserling has said, the reason why the Roumanians have more *esprit* than any race except the French is because Athens and Constantinople were the centres where it could be found, not Rome. A sudden vision of the traditional Roman makes me smile as I compare him with the modern Roumanians. The hard-headed unimaginative Roman was a stranger to the comic spirit and, as George Meredith would say, had a treble-Dutch cumbersomeness without even the saving drollery. The Romans lacked lyrical talent, though they appreciated the fine flowers of Greece's poets, but rather as the Englishman prizes an old master. He likes to feel the sense of possession and be able to make that picture speak its message to him whenever he wishes.

Mæcenas was characteristic of the Roman in so far as he preferred to be a patron than a member of the slightly shady fraternity of poets who ate laurel-leaves to produce orgiastic frenzy and poured malicious satire on the solemn institutions of the State. No, it was not respectable for a Roman to recite poems in his *toga*: it would produce an analogous effect to-day in England if a banker dressed in morning coat and top-hat were to recite Walter de la Mare in an office in Threadneedle Street. The Roumanians are too flighty and epigrammatic to be descended from the Romans. If Professor Grimm had lived in A.D. 68 he would have shocked the business men of Rome as Nero did and I should have found him wearing a parsley crown in the arena. In Roumania to-day there is such a plethora of lyricism that we feel inclined to exclaim in the words of Lope de Vega—"en cada esquina mil poetas." When I expressed aloud my views there was a general chorus of agreement. They applauded my statements that Roumania was called to fulfil a great destiny—"yes, friends, you are all going to save Byzantinism for the world and bring to us again your exquisite patterns and mosaics, your mysterious wide-eyed ikons, the glittering Magian art of the east—and your Teodorescu, the archæologist, will delve deep into that musty Byzantine period of history where the culture extended its ways through to the West,

to Spain with its relics of Byzantine liturgical music, to Ireland with its *Book of Kells*." Grimm then urged the claims of Russia as the great spiritual mistress and pointed out the similarity between the arts of Roumanian peasantry and those of the Ukraine. The Roumanian *doinas* and *Horas* too, he thought, were full of the soft melancholy of the South Russian. But then I told him of an experience which once befell me with some Gypsies from Odessa; they were the saddest set of human beings I had ever seen; they had fiddles and played them in a sobbing way, until suddenly for some reason or other a queer spirit seemed to enter their bodies and goad them into a mad frenzy. There was a wizened old woman amongst them drunk with vodka, who danced the *gopak* in a way that suggested a *mænad*, and the others roused her by their cries into ever-increasing rhythmic vertigo until she fell in a heap on the ground as though slain by the Tarantula. According to Amos Frăncu, this queer orgiastic frenzy of the South Russian Gypsies, which possesses them so that they become like the Bacchantes of Euripides, is called in Russian *Dukh*. The Roumanian Gypsies have not got this force in their system and thus lack fierceness and temperament.

As for myself, whether it was due to my experiences with Hungarian Gypsies or not, but I felt the *Dukh* of the Russians invading me. Dionysus always drives his devotees into this state, but before he solicits the aid of the god of Lampsacus. In ancient days the Phallic god was received in every company because he signified the fertility of the earth and women touched his symbol to achieve increase and multiply. No festival, however solemn, was complete without the meeting at the bridges when men and women loosed the floodgates of grossness and laughed away their repressions.

To-day the god of gardens has become an emasculated scarecrow and bawdy-talk is relegated to the stables. Among cultivated foreigners under the influence of wine and food, Rabelais appears but *en redingote*, blowing on puny bellows with no mellowing gag. He only darts flashes here and there in subtle innuendo and *double entendre*.

We all roared out our applause when anyone tossed a jest, and the two girls hid behind their fans. As George Meredith said, the fan symbolized the triumph of the comic spirit, for it permitted the ladies to join the men at their parties. When they found the sallies dangerous they could hide behind the arch, but there was always the eyelet through which they could spy out the land. Athena and Nunuța more than once retired behind their arch, but a roguish eye beamed out at us.

It was Negosanu, the Porthos of the party, who played Gargantua for us : when he opened his mouth to take a drink he could have swallowed all the burghers of Paris. Having forgotten that he had told me of his three wives he now informed me that he was no longer a Roumanian, but a Turkish citizen, and had a harem with three wives. His life was an inferno because the older wife was jealous of the attentions paid to him by the younger women. Soon, however, he left the *Arabian Nights* and transported us to Florence, where he had been an art student.

When he was a young man working in that city he went one day up to the Piazza Michelangelo to gaze upon the view over the Arno. While he was leaning on the parapet deeply buried in his dream he felt a nudge at his elbow. Turning round he saw standing beside him a little old man with a white beard. The little fellow, looking up at him admiringly, said : " Oh, sir, you are a god in strength and beauty ! May I beg a great favour from you ? Do not deny me, for it is not on my account I ask the boon." Negosanu, surprised, asked what he could do to help him. " Sir, you are young and strong : strip off your coat and let me feel the muscles of your arm." The old man at the sight of the painter's Herculean limbs uttered exclamations of satisfaction. He then became restless and asked Negosanu to follow him to a place where a surprise was awaiting him. The latter expected that some trick was in store for him, but, after all, he was young and curious : besides, six feet two inches and the muscles of Antæus are a match for any eventuality. Down they descended to the city and the little white-haired old man hopped about

like a sparrow, trying vainly to keep up with the painter's stride. At last in a street behind the Duomo they came to a luxurious palazzo. After passing through a long corridor they entered a beautiful apartment furnished in Renaissance style. After waiting for a while, suddenly the door opened and a lady entered dressed in a black velvet cloak. Negosanu was young, but among the art students he was considered a connoisseur of female beauty in spite of his Gargantuan height. He had never seen anyone so beautiful: she was pale, with classical features and very black hair pulled back from her brow. The little old man then said: "Oh, Flora, my beloved, I have brought you a hero, a paragon of men, one whose equal you have never seen before." The lady then gravely came up to our artist, and putting her arms around his neck kissed him on the lips. Then she opened her cloak, and the painter saw that she was stark naked. The little old man could not contain his excitement, but hopped around them gurgling with delight. To Negosanu the whole adventure seemed fantastically unreal and he expected to see at any moment a black slave appear armed with a scimitar. Vague fancies floated in his mind of Messalina on the garden couch with Silius and the populace clamouring for the death of Rome's Harlot.

However, like the Don Juan of Byron, he submitted with good grace and returned the girl's embrace. The old man then clapped his hands and cried out to him: "Dale, dale, dale"—which means "Give it to her." At the hour of sunset our friend Negosanu departed from the mysterious house and wended his weary way back to his solitary lodgings. Many times afterwards he called at the house, but a scowling Cerberus turned him away without ceremony. All the information he was able to glean was that she was a countess and the old man, her husband, a general. Negosanu told his story as though Boccacio had whispered it in his ear with the addition of many other little details that could not be told before the two actresses. There was a touch of melancholy about his reminiscence, though I must confess I thought the old man had followed the policy of *Le cocu magnifique* of Crommelynck, and sought of his own

free will the horns that destiny had always held above him like a sword of Damocles. Like the *cocu magnifique* he was wise to go out and choose his rival instead of forcing himself into an artificial paroxysm of fury in the true Latin husband manner when he found a lover in the house. It is unnatural to-day on the Continent to play Othello with the pillow near at hand, for men can no longer act their parts to the end unconsciously. A man sees his wife in the arms of another man: he advances menacingly towards the guilty pair, his eyes blazing, his face pale with emotion, ready to fulminate like Vulcan, but then he stumbles mentally. He watches himself act the fury as though he had seen his mind in an inner mirror which was painfully clear. As soon as he had seen himself act he could hardly keep down the ends of his mouth, for they wanted to fly up into an arch of sarcastic laughter. Sounds of fury signifying nothing do not suit the modern Continental man, nor does the opposite English attitude related by Frank Harris. He tells of a husband who went into his study one day and found his wife and his artist friend in one another's arms. "I shut the door quietly," he said with great dignity, "and afterwards I showed them I was quite annoyed."

After Negosanu's stories we heard those of Amos Frăncu, who was full of the wisdom of a lifetime spent in ministering as a lawyer to the weaknesses of human nature. He gave us many "piquant" anecdotes of life in Bucharest in the old days when the city was more picturesque than at present. When he was younger the life in the capital showed more Turkish characteristics than to-day; Roumanian women like those in the harems were not allowed to read and write, so that intrigues might be avoided. In nothing has Roumania made more progress than in the education of women, and it is this high degree of culture in the salons of the capital that has paved the way for reforms. Amos Frăncu, who was devoted to the Roumanian peasant, told me fierce stories of past days when the peasants rose *en masse* and revenged themselves on their rulers in the most brutal manner. The peasant

was amiable and courteous, but then there came a time when he rose to a state of fury as though much brooding had overwrought his emotions. In his village life he was always held in check by the iron discipline of his Church and his manner was servile. How could it be otherwise when centuries of oppression had played havoc with his soul? In the big estates the workmen were serfs and were treated like the Roman slaves who worked in the underground *ergastula*. Until recently those fetid underground dwellings were considered good enough resting-places for the mere Wallach. "It has taken a long time," Frăncu said, "to accustom the peasant to a life of freedom and make him shed his servility, for with servility are allied deceit and cunning, the results of tyranny. Serfs are lazy because all enterprise has been taken from them. The Roumanian peasant was lazy, and it is only lately that he has awakened to the ideal of work as the gospel of human progress." As Frăncu was holding forth Teodorescu was humming *doinas* to himself and not paying any attention to the conversation. He was the most childlike personality of the party, and when the god Dionysus fired his veins he would become plaintive and sing song after song mingled with racy little anecdotes of country life. By his playful semi-humorous, semi-sad temperament he reminded me irresistibly of the Irish actor, Joe Kerrigan. Joe Kerrigan has been known to entertain company for two hours on end by his Irish songs and poems. He is like an old country pedlar who puts his hand ever and anon into his big sack and pulls out a delicate piece of embroidery. Ireland in its folk-lore temperament must resemble Roumania, for I found myself unconsciously fitting my Roumanian friend into an Irish body. Take the following melody from a *doina* sung by him :





It has a decided Celtic flavour about it and reminded me of the *Coolin* :



And this humorous, wistful personality of Teodorescu must be entirely the creation of his Bohemian surroundings, for I have seen him in the University analysing coldly the archæological relics of his country. It was six o'clock in the evening when we all issued forth into the streets arm in arm and singing "Isidor" at the top of our voices. It was dusk, but people turned round to see the rowdy band of revellers pass by. First of all we went to Negosanu's apartment to see his pictures—and modern ones they were too, for he is a friend and admirer of André Loth. Later on in the evening anyone visiting Negosanu's flat would have been surprised to hear a full orchestra of snores proceeding from the studio. There he would have seen D'Artagnan, Athos and Aramis lying on a wide embroidered couch—Porthos the giant at full length on the ground. Our awakening was like that of the Seven Sleepers and we sent the servant boy down to the shop for wine and jubilation started again. When we reached the Coroană restaurant for dinner at ten o'clock Negosanu brought his new fiancée to join the party. Alas! this party was *crambe repetita* and lacked the gaiety of the former. There was an air of heavy dullness over all of us. Only Teodorescu rose to save the situation and told us stories and sang songs. What had come over Negosanu, the jovial Bohemian, with his air of Aretino? Not a word would he say, and I felt that to sail down on the company with a cargo of jokes would be to court disaster. Amos Frăncu whispered to me: "He is afraid to show the Bohemian side of his character before his girl: she might think badly of him. Look at him, our Gargantua, reduced to the-size

of a catchpole. That is the pathos of the man who gets married: the golden scales of his Bohemian personality fall off one by one."

"That was a characteristic remark for a hardened old bachelor to make," thought I to myself as I walked alone back to my lodgings. Why do engaged couples play-act for one another? Not once do they show themselves in their true colours, and so both create a romantic unreal personality, and this personality is so uninteresting that it becomes intolerable. I have often been struck by the look of tragic boredom on the faces of engaged and even honeymoon couples. They have few topics to discuss because she must be the girlish bride, and he must draw down over his bachelor life an asbestos curtain and show himself to her as the perfect hero and prig. She wonders if her dream has come to an end, and he thinks of Aspasia, who at this moment may be entertaining by her sallies his comrades in the café. Why was Aspasia able to draw the best thoughts from him? She may have been a *cocotte*, but she had an interesting mind. So occupied was I with my thoughts about Aspasia that I did not see where I was walking and stumbled over an inert black mass. At first I thought it was an enormous bundle of rags, but a muffled blasphemy reached my ears. The bundle uncoiled like a hedgehog and I found it was a ragged peasant woman. She had been lying asleep by her bundle of country produce waiting for the morning market. All around I saw similar huddled forms on the hard ground and in the silence of the night the air seemed to be full of phantoms.

*Among the Gypsies of Cluj*

ONE morning as I was strolling through the flower-market in Cluj, the monumental Rosa seized me by the arm and shouted in my ear: "Come on, sir, you must come to visit us in the 'Street of the Spoons': we're going to have a marriage in the family and you're invited." I accepted the invitation with alacrity, and then Rosa in her usual voice loosened the floodgates of bantering obscenity, and her mountainous breast heaved with merriment as I attempted to parry her witty epigrams, and she twisted herself into grotesque shapes as the tears of laughter streamed down her puffy red face. Some other Gypsies came up and joined the group of laughter, holding both its sides. All of them repeated Rosa's invitation and informed me that a Gypsy wedding is a unique opportunity for spreeing and that one should never refuse an invitation to a Gypsy wedding.

That evening at six o'clock I set out to visit the Gypsies. At that hour the sun was sinking and all the country around Cluj was bathed in a crimson light which made the houses look like fairy palaces of the *Arabian Nights*. Outside the city in the calm of the evening there was a hush as though nature was gazing in awe at the majestic death of the sun; the sky with its red clouds resembled a blazing Walhalla, and even the birds that shortly before were singing merrily now hushed their voices as the grey shadow of dusk stole over the scene. The "Street of the Spoons" straggles up a hill in a zigzag, as though it was firmly determined not to fit into any orderly mosaic of town streets. With its pathetic rough wooden houses it made me think of the most dilapidated negro quarters of New Orleans.

The houses were of wood, but the wood had been collected anywhere and anyhow : trunks of trees joined on to pieces of packing-cases : all the remnants of the dust-heap gathered together. There was no symmetry in construction and every house seemed to say to its neighbour : " I am a Gypsy house and I shall be independent : if your beams bulge one way, mine will bulge the other way : if your roof tilts one way, mine will tilt another."

" An ideal street for an artist," thought I, and why not call the picture " The Town-planner's Nightmare " ?

At this hour of the evening the street was thronged with men, women and children. The Gypsies return from their work at five o'clock, which seems early, but as one told me, they get up at 4.30 a.m. and remain away the whole day. On another occasion when I visited this street at three-thirty in the afternoon I found not a soul in any of the houses, for everyone was away at work. But now at six o'clock the life of the community was in full swing. Crowds of scantily-clad children followed me, making rude remarks and pointing at the fiddle I was carrying. Every house was open and the women were cooking the family dinners outside, all but on the road, and were stirring great pots hanging over the fires.

Around the fires stood men and women chatting : here and there I heard girls sing, and in one corner I saw a ragged Gypsy fumbling his flute. In front of nearly every house a fire was lit on the ground and in the deepening gloom of the evening these fires seemed to have been kindled from falling sparks of the dying sun. The lighting of such fires in front of their houses means more to the wandering folk than mere material heat : it is a tradition handed down from the old days of fire worship, and as I gazed on the scene I thought of the Gypsy-poem quoted by Barrow in " The Zincali " :

Las Muchis (The Sparks).

" Bus de gres chabalas orchiris man diqué a yes chiro purelar sistilias sata rujias, y or sisli carjibal diñando trutas discandas."

"More than a hundred lovely daughters I see produced at one time, fiery as roses : in one moment they expire gracefully circumvolving."

Opposite one house I saw an old man crouching alone over his fire. He was of commanding stature and was clad in a long white garment. His complexion was as dark as that of a Hindoo and it seemed all the more swarthy on account of the snow-white hair and venerable beard. As he crouched over the fire he kept muttering to himself as though he was trying to draw magic spells from the flames that lit up his features. Farther up the street I came upon the one tavern of the community. At this hour it was crammed full of Gypsies drinking. When I entered I was nearly suffocated by the fumes of tobacco and deafened by the shouts of the revellers. In a corner I found a Gypsy from Huedin called Lajos : he had come here the previous day and there he was with his fiddle under his arm. Lajos was pleased to see me, for he had not yet met anyone who would pay for his drink and his thirst was Gargantuan. I had taken the precaution to bring my purse with me on this trip, for I knew that loose money is a boon at a Gypsy feast, and so I was able to stand a few rounds. Then fiddles were pulled out and Lajos and I played to one another. Soon we were both intoxicated on rhythm and I had forgotten all about Rosa and her invitation, when a tiny mahogany-coloured child came up to me and whispered the word "Rosa" in my ear. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I could escape from Lajos, for he had reached the happy, dreamy state of intoxication and clung to me as to a brother. The tiny tot led me out of the café and along the street to Rosa's house, where I found all the family assembled behind the house around a huge cauldron of steaming tomato soup. Rosa was stirring the soup with a ladle and in the light of the fire she looked like a priestess of some Oriental rite : she was wearing an astrakhan cap which was shaped like a wizard's conical hat. Her complexion was olive and her eyes had the glint of opals ; her black hair was tousled

and the rebellious tresses seemed to writhe like the serpent locks of a Medusa. Around her played innumerable brats of all ages and in the background sat another girl holding in her arms the latest born. This child was sucking at the distended breast which the mother held out for it : Gypsy women are never ashamed of exposing their naked breasts to the gaze of strangers.

Rosa is not the mother of the family, the "dai" : she is only one of the elder daughters, but she rules all the rest, and one of the men informed me that the inhabitants of the whole street called her queen of the Roms. She straightway introduced me to her old mother, a wizened hag who had a great reputation as a *gule romni* or magician. I had hardly been talking to her for a few minutes when she cried out for a coin to cross my palm. "Ah but, mister, you have a wonderful palm : look you here ! I see you have been thinking of your mistress : she has fair hair and she will be yours in a month, but you will need my help for the first night. I can tell you whether she is a virgin or no and I'll prepare her for you and she'll kill you with exhaustion unless you drink my brew which even the stoutest husband needs on the first night when his young bride feels the desire for twins coming upon her."

Rosa's mother then stopped to calculate the effect her words had produced on me, and then she started to whine for a twenty-lei note to enable her to delve into the recesses of her magic, but I had given her one before and I was not eager to hear any more of her *dukkerin*.

Rosa rescued me and made me sit down by the others to partake of their supper. I sat beside Mara, a very beautiful sister of Rosa, about nineteen years of age. There was something far more exotic about Mara than about any of the others : all their grossness seemed to have dropped from her as though snake-wise she had sloughed it off. In contrast to Rosa she was as slender as a drooping flower and her masses of black hair were a frame to the perfect beauty of her face. Her eyes were large and luminous and her eyebrows strongly pencilled :

her complexion had that golden pallor we associate with Andalusian Carmens, but there was no trace of coquettishness in her expression. She wore haughtiness and indifference as a mask to conceal an intense sadness.

"Poor Mara," the mother said to me, "she is condemned: no doctor in the world can cure her, for it is her lungs that are ailing: she may be taken any day from us, the doctor says."

The girl said nothing, for she was the picture of mute resignation to her fate. Every now and then her whole frame quivered and she began to cough violently. With Gypsies it is impossible to linger on sad thoughts and next moment a coarse sally from Rosa made the whole company roar with laughter. Mara and her fate were forgotten, but I could not get the picture of the sad girl out of my mind as she rocked herself to and fro in front of the fire.

Though the Gypsies in the "Street of the Spoons" live in houses they spend all their time out of doors and only use them in winter-time when there is rain and snow. They are sedentary Gypsies, but they still preserve many traits of the nomadic Gypsies who live in tents and wander through the land. The houses are little better than tents to sleep in and in most cases there were no beds in the rooms, but the people lay on rugs and skins on the bare ground. All their meals they take outside beside the characteristic Gypsy fire. As I looked up the street I saw Gypsy fires outside every house and groups of Gypsies in white around them. The effect was weird, as though I had suddenly been transported into one of the fire-worshipping tribes of the Far East. I felt that this community of Gypsies was living on the fringe of Western civilization as pariahs. The "Street of the Spoons" was driven outside the city of Cluj as though none of its inhabitants had the right of living within the city walls. It was called the "Street of the Spoons" owing to the principal profession of the Gypsy community, which consisted in carving wooden spoons from the wood they collected in the forest. Rosa told me that her family were

engaged in many odd employments such as flower-selling, sieve-making, comb-making as well as the wooden-spoon industry. In the autumn many of them worked as agricultural labourers in spite of the well-known Gypsy dislike for work on the land. In all work the women are more active than the men, and it is no uncommon sight to see a woman carrying hods of cement on her shoulders up ladders while her husband lies basking in the sun.

I tried to awaken in Rosa reminiscences of the real nomadic life of the Gypsy race and I said to her: “You are false to the race of Roms, Rosa, for you live in a house in one fixed spot whereas the Gypsies are the kings of nature and should for ever wander towards the distant horizon, sleeping on the hard rocks and listening to the rumbling thunder as sweet music.” But she replied: “Those wandering Roms are savages who degrade the name ‘Rom’ in the world. They live in tents and wander about the country stealing and attacking strangers and there is nothing good in them. Why, we have the greatest scorn for them. Thanks be to God that we have become civilized citizens.” Rosa was quite certain that she was a worthy member of the state and she satisfied her Gypsy conscience by the many superstitions which she in common with the rest of the Gypsy community carried out religiously.

While we were sitting talking by the fire a young girl came up to us, accompanied by a young man. Rosa introduced her to me as the young sister who was to be married in a few days. I then said to Rosa: “Why, your little sister should be going to school rather than getting married—she does not look a day more than twelve years of age.” “No more is she,” answered Rosa; “and what of that: sure the best school for a girl is marriage, and who would teach her more than a man?” The girl was a timid, frightened little thing bearing a strong resemblance to the consumptive elder sister. As for the bridegroom, he was a strapping youth with a face like burnished copper. Rosa then for my



benefit began to banter the young girl unmercifully, using the most crude expressions and everyone else made a chorus of laughing comment. The sedentary Gypsies have not forgotten the old customs and superstitions of the Romany race and before a marriage there are many that must be carried out to the letter of the law. The old witch of a mother added her wisdom to the general talk and I gathered a big store of Gypsy customs.

#### GYPSY MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

"The most important thing of all," said the old hag, "is to see to it that the marriage will be a sweet one. That is why we Gypsies spare no money in buying sweetmeats for the feast, ay, and a girl when she is going before the priest with her bridegroom must put a lump of sugar under her armpit to ensure the sweetness of her wedding. And there are many tasks she must perform before the wedding if she would be sure that her bridegroom's love will last and not fade away into smoke. She must burn flowers gathered on Saint John's Eve as a protection against sickness and she must hang up branches of garlic in her house for luck and against evil, for the garlic turns black after attracting all the evil into itself and so protects her. As for the youth, he must perform the tasks assigned to him. The week before the marriage he must go around the town drinking with his friends in every tavern, for water is the one drink he must avoid. When he is in the tavern he must shout out to all his acquaintances a song which bids them send him gifts and rich ones too if they wish to be invited to the marriage feast. And whenever he can he must walk about with hazel wands in his hand wreathed with ribbons to ward off the influence of water. At the marriage ceremony of the Gypsy clan, which is performed in addition to the religious ceremony in the church, the head of the tribe takes an earthenware jar and after filling it with wine drinks from it and makes the bridal pair drink after plighting their troth. Then he throws the jar behind him and it breaks into many pieces. Husband and wife then keep the fragments and

it is said that they will live together as long as the fragments remain intact with them. If they were to disappear the marriage would be null and void until a second jug is broken before the chief." The old woman gave me many pieces of information about the marriage ceremony, but she did not tally in her description with what I had read in George Borrow. Borrow says in his book on the *Gypsies in Spain* that they are chaste in their bodies and preserve a *lácha ye trupos* as the most precious possession. I told the old woman and Rosa of the ceremony in Spain of the *Diklo*, when the Gypsies carry in the marriage procession the white rag as symbol of the bride's virginity. I also quoted Bright who travelled in Hungary over a hundred years ago and saw a Gypsy bride after her marriage ceremony dancing on a table wearing a blood-stained garment as a proof that her husband had found her a virgin. Rosa burst out laughing at this custom and the old woman shook her head and winked at me roguishly. "I have heard tell," said she, "that among some Gypsy tribes they make the old woman investigate after the marriage whether the girl is a virgin and they then prepare the way for the husband, but I am sure that is all moonshine and fairy stories which were told in the past." The promiscuity of those Gypsies in Cluj in their house life prevents me from believing that they possessed the chastity of the Borrovian Gypsies.

It was after midnight when I left Rosa's house to walk back to Cluj. The street was dark and not a light was shining: here and there I saw the glowing embers of fires and I seemed to feel the presence of innumerable watchers. Half-way down the street I stumbled against a phantom figure who was hurrying past. With a muffled curse he thrust me out of the way and hastened on. The Gypsy community was asleep and a cold breeze blew up the street, scattering the ashes of the fires. The lonely stillness called up before me visions of wandering Gypsies, mud-stained, dishevelled, cadaverous after ceaseless wandering, and I heard as in a dream their moaning songs and inexorable rhythms.

## A GYPSY MARRIAGE

I arrived at the "Street of the Spoons" just as the marriage procession was marching up the street with a flute-player and two fiddlers at the head. A great crowd of Gypsies was following, chattering and laughing. Everybody was in boisterous good humour: the men capered, the women danced, the children squealed, the dogs barked: bedlam was let loose in Gypsy-town. Among the Gypsies the guests always go on the wedding-day to the house of the bride and bring gifts for her. Then they escort the wedding couple to the church and when they get to the enclosure one of the Gypsy patriarchs makes a speech of welcome and good luck. After the church ceremony I was told that the custom was to throw water over the bridal pair and rub them with a bag of weasel skin. Inside this bag there must be thorn-apple seeds which are an excellent preservative against the evil eye. To-day nothing must suggest the evil eye and I am sure anyone with a squint would not be welcomed. I also noticed on several house doors bunches of garlic. Garlic, the Gypsies told me, is the supreme plant for a talisman, for it absorbs all evil in itself. According to Leland, sailors carry garlic to avoid shipwreck and in most parts of the world its magic power is testified since the far-off days when Hermes gave it to Odysseus to protect him against the wiles of Circe.

There was not much solemnity about our Gypsy procession: instead it made me dream of the bawdy Bacchanalian satyric drama of the Athenians with the inevitable *γεγονισμός*. Gypsies are entirely primitive in their lives: they are like children in their gaiety. To-day not one black thought was in any of their minds, for they thought of feasting and nothing else. When we arrived at the house as many of us as possible marched in: the room had been cleaned and there was a table with bottles of wine, glasses and various sweetmeats. There was a fire outside the door and around that many gathered talking at the top of their voices of weddings in general. The women stood together and made personal remarks about

the bride: the men stood in another corner and soon began to drink together. Then came up the minstrels whom I had noticed at the head of the procession. They were three of the most squalid-looking vagabonds I had seen for a long time. The old *Primás*, or first violin, looked the most prosperous, for though his clothes were a mass of rags yet he had on a pair of dingy yellow boots: whereas his companions walked barefoot. He also had a real bow to play with: the others had short curved sticks strung with black horsehair, very slack so that they could play all the strings of the fiddle at once. A queer pair those two bare-legged satellite fiddlers: one of them had lost an eye and his face in consequence was lopsided in appearance. The one remaining eye with its wild glitter reminded me of the eye of the Ancient Mariner: it gave a fierce malignity to his pock-marked face. The other was a contrast owing to his languidly passive air and flabby olive face. Both of them made me irresistibly think of Tweedledum and Tweedledee as they argued with one another, using many gestures and waving their scraggy fiddles and bows in the air. The leader was a tiny man with a certain jauntiness of manner, of darker complexion than the other two musicians, and his face was heavily scarred. Across his forehead was a deep furrow that must once have been a terrible wound. His face reminded me of those indiarubber dolls which change their facial expression according as one squeezes them, but what fascinated me most were his enormous ears which seemed to flap whenever he got excited. It was interesting to watch the gradual change which came over all the people when the wine and music began to work their effect. At first there was a certain stiff formality about the women especially—a certain “Very nicely, thank you,” utterly out of keeping with my idea of the Gypsy at play. But then came the wine and I felt as if the host had suddenly opened a casket and taken out the Wine God and after dusting him and fixing straight his ivy crown had set him on his pedestal. After a few preluding chords the little Gypsy *Primás* commenced playing one of those Gypsy

traditional airs. It was a weird, solemn melody full of restless passion. The Gypsy would unbend his elastic little body and in a frenzied paroxysm then play a succession of notes. Each phrase began thus with the hurried notes and then would come a long pause when the other accompanying fiddles would fill in a chord. The sad music made them languid and mournful and they became again the resigned and lonely watchers of the desert. The lament played this time by our fiddler seemed to spring out of his own inspired improvisation. He suggested the courses that the music was to take and then the singer would seem to withdraw within himself and discover the melody. Mara, the frail, consumptive girl, joined in the song and everyone hung on her lips. As she sang she became the embodiment of sorrow and there was a certain feverish excitement in her voice as though she was afraid of not having enough breath in her lungs to sing her sadness.

As the night wore on the party became more boisterous, for, as I said before, at a Gypsy wedding neither wine nor food is stinted. A youth stood over in the house behind the table and distributed wine and food when it was wanted. Soon the fun became more obscene. Some men recited songs in which, as far as I could judge, the whole point was smutty equivocation. Others told funny stories about the adventures of an innocent bumpkin of a youth and a sensual girl who was very knowing. All roared with laughter at this and the girls added zest to the story by their crude reflections. The wine had now gone to the heads of everyone and reserve was thrown to the winds. I saw men take up empty bottles and dash them against stones, shouting in drunken glee. The Gypsy fiddler and his accompanists had been freely supplied with drinks and could hardly stand up, but they went on playing one dance after another. In a corner two men were jumping up and down as though possessed by a kind of malignant St. Vitus's dance. As for the young bride, she was a pitiful little figure in a corner. All this party was to wish her happiness and joy, but she

looked like the picture of unrelieved sorrow. Even her new husband did not pay any attention to her, for he was drinking in a corner with two boon companions. At one moment she leant her head in her hands and I saw her body shake as she sobbed. But nobody heeded her : for her this was the last day of her old life and the beginning of the unknown. It was like Death, a passage to another state, and it was with terror that her childlike mind envisaged it. For the others this night was the occasion for a Bacchanal when they might arouse all the dormant passions. Later on someone suggested that we should move on to another house to continue the festivities. At once this suggestion was received with acclamation and the party set out. It was about three o'clock and the night was pitch dark. Not a soul was abroad in the streets as we walked through. The procession reminded me of the descriptions given by Stobæus of the Eleusinian mysteries. First came the bride and her groom, followed by a motley crowd. Some of them carried torches which lit up their swarthy features and gave them the appearance of high priests of Iacchus. The three fiddlers followed, playing as they walked. By this time I was on terms of great familiarity with all the Gypsies and two walked along beside me with their arms round my neck. At the back of the procession came the boy and another Gypsy carrying a basket full of wine bottles and food. When we arrived at the other house we found many waiting to join the feast. First of all the baskets of food were opened and chickens, hams, loaves of bread and bottles of wine were handed round. As we ate, the Gypsy players circled round amongst us, playing ceaselessly. After the food had been consumed the dancing began afresh as before, but it was more of a drunken brawl. Amidst the Gypsies I noticed now many non-Gypsy vagabonds of rascally appearance who were more rowdy and more drunken than the rest. By this time the first faint lights of dawn began to appear : in the greenish light the faces of the men and women looked like spectres, and the glow of the Gypsy fires did not

suffice to bring the glow of life into the scene. I was weary and my voice was hoarse through shouting. I felt it was time for me to leave the party, when I stumbled across two maudlin vagabonds lying on the ground near the door of the house. In a corner a man and his wife were quarrelling. He was abusing her, using all the filthy words of the Roumanian vocabulary, and she in fury rose up against him. I heard the sickening thud as he hit her and rolled her on the ground, a shrieking mass. When I left the "Street of the Spoons" it was five o'clock, and as I walked back to my lodgings I thought of that Gypsy family which would have two more days of this restless inferno to endure, for a Gypsy wedding starts on Saturday and does not finish until Monday evening. By that time those unfortunate people in carrying out the task of marrying off their daughter will have saddled themselves with debts which will take years to pay. As Borrow says of the Spanish Gypsies and their marriage feasts: "Throughout the three days the Gypsies appear to be under the influence of infatuation, having no other wish or thought but to make away with their substance; some have gone so far as to cast money by handfuls into the street. Throughout the three days all the doors are left open and all comers, whether Gypsies or Gentiles, welcomed with a hospitality that knows no bounds."

One custom of the Gypsies had struck me very much at this wedding feast. When I was in the house of the host I saw on the table two very beautiful old carved silver cups. The cups excited my curiosity not only because of their beautiful workmanship, but because in every other respect the house was bare of ornament. Such cups are the precious heirlooms of certain Gypsy families and have been handed down from father to son as objects that are to be regarded with religious awe. Originally, who knows, the cups may have been stolen from some great lord and preserved in the family of the Gypsy for years. When the Gypsies find themselves in debt they bring those cups to a certain *Mont de Piété* and pawn them. Every now and then, however, they

go and take out their cups to gaze on their beauty and drink from them. When there is a marriage-feast the cup is redeemed and it is passed round as a loving-bowl to drink the health of the bride. The superstition of the cups is very common among the wandering folk, for it is said that there is no Gypsy family in Transylvania without its heirloom, and no matter how poor the owners may become, no matter if starvation stares them in the face, they will never sell the cup that has been handed down to them as a symbol of the past. Grellmann, in his history of Gypsies, laid great stress on this custom and showed how great a burden such heirlooms were for the heirs who could not sell them. The cups I saw looked as if they dated back to the eighteenth century, but it is said that many go back still farther—to the sixteenth and even to the fifteenth century. In *La Gitanilla* Cervantes described how wandering Gypsy bands were required by the magistrates to deposit silver ornaments as guarantee that during their period of camping no one in the villages would be robbed. These ornaments must have been the silver cups in question. When I asked one of the Gypsies how he was to prevent anyone from stealing his cup, he replied that it was the custom to bury it in a spot near the house. Alas, I am afraid that on Tuesday morning my Gypsy friends of the "Street of the Spoons," when they have said farewell to their wedded daughter, will sadly depart to the bank at Cluj and store those beautiful cups in order to raise money to pay for the riotous living of the past three days.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*

#### HE WAS A GYPSY SPELL-BINDER

I OFTEN used to tell my children at home the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, but I was quite unprepared to meet him in the middle of Transylvania. Every surprise is possible for the man who goes gypsying in the east of Europe. When you go through the wilds you continually meet old women who turn out to be fairy godmothers in disguise, and the story of Philemon and Baucis takes place in every cottage where you halt for the night.

After leaving Cluj, as I plodded along the road the country became more and more fantastic. Nature in Transylvania has not had the opportunity of becoming well known to the international traveller, and every turn of the road offers fresh surprises.

I passed by mighty mountain ranges full of countless caverns and boiling torrents. Unconsciously my mind travelled back to days when I had wandered in the Sierra Morena. Torda Cleft became the Pass of "Despeñaperros" and at every step I expected to see the Knight of Sorrowful Figure martyrizing his soul in penance for Dulcinea. First of all I seemed to meet Ginés de Pasamonte, the famous robber: he was descending from one of the caves and accosted me. Luckily for me I had not a donkey with me, else he would have stolen it as he did Sancho's. I felt as I walked along that I was surrounded by a crew of enchanters and I should not have been surprised to find the ragged, wild-eyed Cardenio at the turn of the road. Through this lonely pass with its mighty mountains, how many races must have passed in the migrations from East to West? Every cave must

have sheltered refugees or harboured hermits in those far-off days when the Gypsy wanderers came in from the East. I was told that the enormous cleft of Torda was formed as a result of Divine help. One day the Magyar King, Ladislaus, fled with his army to this mountain with a crowd of his enemies at his heels. All seemed lost and the Pagan army was about to massacre his host, when the King, being a Christian, thought of prayer. In answer God forthwith broke the enemy in twain and separated the King's army from his pursuers by the deep ravine along which I wandered.

Farther along I saw a very strange fellow walking in front of me with a springing step. He was dark-complexioned and wore a coat of many colours such as Gypsies were traditionally supposed to wear. He had a flute in his hand and as he walked he played a little rhythmic tune which fascinated me. I could not help stepping out in time to the tune. It drove me frantic, that tune: I felt it sink into my inner being and willy-nilly I had to follow the little man. On and on I went, and on and on he played. I could not catch up on him in spite of all my exertions. I was weary and faint of breath and my body wanted to rest, but my legs seemed to be filled with diabolical energy, for they sprang on after the piper. At last towards sunset he sat on a stone and beckoned to me. He put up the accursed flute in his pocket and so I was able to approach.

PIPER: "Where are you going, wanderer? I see by your fiddle you are a player, but your fair hair does not betoken you a Gypsy."

MYSELF: "No, I am no gypsy, but only a simple traveller who is wandering towards Sibiu, the city of the Saxons."

PIPER: "And I am leading you there, for that city is mine and owes its origin to me."

MYSELF: "How so, Sir Piper? I was told that Hermannstadt was founded by the poor baron Hermann, the courtier of fair Gisela, the German princess, who became the bride of Stephen I, the Magyar King, and

Hermann brought all his family from Nuremberg to make a Saxon-land in this country."

PIPER : " Ah, that is where you are wrong, O scraper of catgut : it was I who brought the fair-haired Saxons in the year 1284, and I'll tell you my story. My race came into Europe in the dim ages and worked in bronze : they were soothsayers, magicians, and they could weave magic spells by their music, for they could store up sounds and use them as charms to bring the rain or thunder or the wind. They could let loose in the world melodies that made the sons of men distraught with madness. Of such race called the race of Rom was I born, and I was given by my father a magic flute which responded to the traditional rhythms of our race and also many charms to work upon the foolish people of the West, so sluggish in their understanding. I became a rat-catcher, for in those days the plague of rats was the scourge of Europe and whenever I appeared the people hailed me as a deliverer. In 1284 I reached the town of Hameln in Hanover and I offered to rid it of its vermin. The Mayor and Town Council jumped up in eagerness to greet me and I was feasted royally. My flute was not laggard, I assure you, and hey presto, a mighty rustling was heard on all sides. In the distance a dark mass advanced after me—a crawling, squeaking mass of rats and mice. Out of the houses they came in tens of thousands hypnotized by my queer little rat tune. On I led them in tune to the music until we arrived at the banks of the River Weser. Then when I entered the water, lo, all the vermin plunged into their watery grave before I finished my tune. It was then time to collect the money for my labours, but alas, the Mayor and his Council, now that the plague was gone, tried to treat me as the *busno* always treats the Gypsy. No bargain is valid with a son of Romany who is more fitted to be a serf than a freeman. When I play my music, then the Gentile follows me and puts his arm about me as though he was my blood-brother : it is then that I drink the rich Tokay at his expense and finger the heavy gold coins in his purse. But when I

stop my playing he turns and curses me as a ragged Gypsy. However, we Gypsies, though we turn a smiling face to the white man, yet mutter under our breath curses in our own language. And the vengeance of a Gypsy is the most deadly in the world, for we stick at nothing. I retired from Hameln to meditate my plans. On the 26th June, the day of St. John, I reappeared in Hameln and started to play the strange tune on my pipe. Lo and behold, the little children of the town heard my tune and came toddling towards me. On they came in hundreds, down the stairs, out the doors, from the palaces as well as the hovels. No force in the world could restrain them, for I was playing my most deadly tune of all, the tune that Orpheus played when he led the distraught women and animals after him in mad race. Fathers and mothers tried to prevent them, nurses clasped them to their bosoms, but all to no purpose. Every moment my band grew as I piped away. I led them in an unending dance to a hill outside the town. Now this hill was a magic one and we Gypsies have always had the key to its subterranean caverns. It opened, and after I had disappeared with my band it closed again. Not a child was left, and I can laugh at the scared, tragic faces of the Mayor and all the citizens of yon town. But no, I forgot, there was one child who did not follow me. He was a little boy who must have sprung from Gypsy parents, for he was not bowled over by my tricks. He felt cold and went back to his home. But mark me, sir, I had no intention of killing those children: we Gypsies love our children more deeply than any of you Gentiles, and when we steal a little Christian child it is for *bacht* or luck, and we look on it with awe because baptism has given it a higher magic than ours. I disappeared with my band and drew them along countless subterranean passages until finally I reached Transylvania, the land that has been settled by our roving bands, and there in a cave in the north-east, called Almescher Hohle, I brought them all up to the light of day. And now in a trice many years had passed: they had become grown men

and women. They settled together and made themselves into a kingdom separated from the other races. They are fair-haired and blue-eyed in contrast to the dark Magyar and Roumanian. Their folk-lore is foreign and they keep up still the practices of their old home on the banks of the Weser. And to-day as formerly, my Gypsy brethren have more power over those slow-thinking folk than over any Roumanian or Magyar. We cheat them in our sleep and run when the man of the house orders us away with oaths, but we see out of the corner of our eye the mistress beckoning to us at the back door, for she wants the lines on her hands read."

It was dusk when the Pied Piper finished his story, and without a word of warning he began to disappear slowly: his coat of many colours faded to a shimmering white and all that was left for a time was his queer, sardonic smile.

"Curious," thought I, "I must be back in the world of Alice and Dinah's smile."

All the same, however, the queer rhythmic tune continued to beat on my ear faintly but insistently. I kept on following it mile after mile through a dull, prosaic country. At last I reached the gates of the Saxon city, and there the music suddenly ceased, and I found myself back in modern life once more.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *Sibiu or Hermannstadt*

#### LIFE AMONG THE SAXONS

WHEN the Pied Piper left me I rubbed my eyes in amazement. The town where I found myself did not seem to be in Transylvania, for it had no Roumanian or Hungarian characteristics. The narrow streets and old gabled houses made me think of Nuremberg and at any moment I expected to meet Beckmesser with his guitar. Everywhere I went I could see old watch-towers, ramparts, houses with heavy grated windows that recalled days of sieges long ago. Its Saxon origin had given the town a certain air of austere gravity, but in addition there was an air of mystery about those crooked streets with their countless tunnels connecting one another. It is said that those tunnels are relics of the old days, when the Turks were the terror of the country.

A walk through Hermannstadt was a fascinating experience, for at every step there were fresh sights. Sometimes I turned off the streets into one of the tunnels and after walking for a few minutes in the dark suddenly found myself in a queer little secret garden. Nearly every gabled house had old inscriptions on its walls and wrought-iron bars.

In contrast to the gay atmosphere of Cluj, Hermannstadt is sad and mysterious. At night the streets are silent and the people who walk about do not sing or talk loudly. They are thoroughly Teutonic in character, with fair hair and blue eyes. Mrs. Gerard in her description of the Saxons is hard on them. The women, she says, have rather good hair, indifferent complexions, narrow shoulders, flat busts and gigantic feet. Their features, of a sadly unfinished wooden appearance, reminded her

of the figures of Noah out of a sixpenny Noah's Ark.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the people have changed since 1888, when her book was published, but I thought the majority of the women I saw good-looking. Many were so fair and so tall, that they made one think of Scandinavian beauty rather than German. They all seemed to have the secret of a beautiful complexion—a rare quality to-day, when women insist on painting up their faces into a universal mask.

It is quite true that the people are reserved and stiff, but it is only because we inevitably compare them with the Magyar and the Roumanian, two of the most spontaneous and hospitable peoples in Europe. It is said that the Magyars and the Roumanians can never accustom themselves to the inhospitable and grasping ways of the Saxon who never asks you to sit down with him at his table. The impression we derive from looking at those fair-haired men and women is one of strength and tenacity. Here they have existed for seven hundred years, a mere handful, surrounded by races that have nothing in common with them, and yet they have not lost those customs that attach them to their fatherland. When you come to their villages you find solid peasants' houses surrounded by a wall. Inside everything is tidy and clean, mugs for beer hang from pegs on the dresser, the cushions and pillows are embroidered, not in the imaginative style of the Hungarians or Roumanians, but in the conventional German. Their costume too they have kept intact through the centuries and in some villages near Hermannstadt, where the Saxons have become entirely Roumanian in language, they still cling to the traditional costume.

One of the most characteristic parts of the unmarried girl's costume is the *borten*. It is a high cardboard brimless hat covered with black velvet with numerous ribbons streaming from it. The girl wears, generally, a very voluminous black skirt and a bodice with bulging sleeves. On her breast she carries a big saucer-shaped ornament called the *patzel*, which, I was informed, is a symbol of

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, Vol. I.

maidenhood. After marriage the *borten* and *patzel* are discarded and in some places the wedding guests dance down the former to show that her life as a girl is over. The dancing down of the *borten* reminds me of the custom at some English public schools of playing football with tall hats on the last night before leaving. All the married women join hands and dance round the bride. At a given moment a robber endeavours to steal her *borten*, but he is kept at bay by her brothers for a time. At last the dance ends with the trampling down of the hat and the bride mourns over the symbol of her lost maidenhood, but the married women then put on her head the white cap and veil of the spouse.

As a stranger I was fascinated by the Saxons in Hermannstadt, for they were such a contrast to the Hungarians and Roumanians that it seems a miracle that they have lasted so long. There is a girl at my inn called Elsa, who gave me a wealth of information about the Saxons. First let me describe Elsa. She is not sylph-like in form, but as heavy and massive as a mule. Elsa could carry sacks of coal up three flights of stairs without straining herself. She is the epitome of apple-cheeked healthiness. Her hair is flaxen and her eyes as blue as the cornflower, but Elsa has not a single beautiful feature in her face. Her nose is small and snub : her mouth is too large and her lips too thick, but all the same Elsa is a tasty morsel for any rustic Don Juan, though he would have to pay his court warily, for Elsa can deliver a punch that would knock a man out. She is the maidservant at the inn where I am staying and she has been a friend to me. She likes me because I am German-looking and have fair hair. Elsa is convinced of the superiority of Saxon stock, and she will ramble on in her curious thick German patois about the virtues of her race and the inferiority of the Roumanians. She has one fault which I noticed very soon : she is a bit of a miser and loves to hoard her wages. I am afraid her savings will never amount to much, for no rich travellers come to the humble inn, but in her conversation the eternal theme was money, money, and she



would work herself up into a paroxysm over the price of clothes and food. Though she had a taint of avarice in her nature, Elsa was very moral and religious. Many men visited the hotel and paid her compliments, but Elsa would allow no liberties, and I have seen her smack a Roumanian's face because he tickled her in the back. She was a devout member of her Church and went every Sunday to the service because there was a pastor in the church near by for whom she had an unbounded admiration. Once when talking of Saxon churches she told me of a queer superstition which still exists among the peasants. It is customary to keep provisions stored up within the church walls as a remnant from the old days, when there was a continual fear of Turkish or Tartar invasion. Elsa added that in her own village the people thought it lucky to store bacon and wheat in niches in the church walls. It would seem as if the prudent, thrifty spirit of the Saxons had degenerated after centuries of tenacious struggle in a far-off land into a mania for hoarding. Probably if the Saxons had not possessed this mania for hoarding their own possessions within the sanctuary of the church walls they would never have survived, placed as they were in the centre of a population that was unsympathetic to their ideals. Elsa had not the slightest trace of artistic feeling, though she was able to do beautiful embroidery work once she had been given a pattern to work upon. When I compared her to the pretty young Roumanian girls with their white veils, their white and black embroideries, I could not help saying to Elsa: "Elsa, why don't you dress up in your Saxon costume with the *borten* and the *patzel* and walk out with the other Saxon girls? You should do that, for you are pretty, Elsa, and I guarantee that you will get a husband if you take my advice." Elsa would then grumble in reply: "Ah, *mein Herr*, the modern men are no use: what's the use in my marrying, only to divorce him a few years later?"

In spite of the tenacity of character possessed by the Saxons the tendency nowadays is for those customs to

disappear. The city is now far less Saxon than in 1888, when Mrs. Gerard wrote her book on Transylvania.

In those far-off days the Roumanians were relegated to the worst quarters of the city, and were treated as an inferior subject race, though everywhere they were in the majority in numbers. In the last ten years Roumania has adopted a strong policy of Roumanizing those districts and soon the Saxon customs will tend to disappear. In accordance with their policy the Roumanians have changed the name of Hermannstadt to Sibiu and in every way encouragement is given to the arts and crafts of the Roumanian countryside. There is in the city an excellent museum of popular art under the direction of Doctor Petrescu, one of the most energetic citizens of Sibiu. Mainly through his exertions a unique collection of embroideries and pottery has been made from this part of Transylvania. No matter how poor the peasant may be, no matter how bare his hovel, he will always find embroideries and pottery. Doctor Petrescu told me that the peasant of Roumania always avoids representing nature in the conventional form as we see in the work of the peasants of other countries. He prefers to embroider in a geometrical pattern, and this tendency is said to have been a characteristic of the dwellers of the plains of the Danube from prehistoric times down to the present day. In the cottages the stranger is amazed by the wealth of colour he sees. Embroidered cushions lie on every side and from the rafters hang dozens of vases decorated in geometric patterns of different colours. If you visit a girl on a feast day or holy day she will take out the sacred images and place lights before them. Curious to relate, the images of Our Lady and Our Lord are not the most popular among the peasants, for they prefer to buy those of Saint Elias and Saint Pantelimon, because they are supposed to exercise the strongest influence on the crops. In the village of Poplaka, near Sibiu, I saw a great many images of those two saints, all of them vivid in colour with large staring eyes in true Byzantine fashion and carved in grotesque shapes. Among the saints occasionally

we come across a scene from the life of Alexander the Great, who has survived down through the ages as a popular hero.

#### A VISIT TO THE METROPOLITAN OF TRANSYLVANIA

One of my friends in Cluj had given me a letter of introduction to the Metropolitan and I determined to call upon him, though I was in a quandary, for my rucksack contained no ceremonious raiment for the occasion and I was afraid to present myself in the ragged costume of a Gypsy. I was told that the great man had a keen sense of humour and would receive me no matter how I dressed, but I thought of his porter and butler and the yelping hounds at the gate. Fortunately I managed to borrow a suit of clothes from a commercial traveller in the inn. He was taller and fatter than I was and the clothes hung rather loose and flabbily, but I knew that I had ceased to look like a Gypsy and had become a commercial traveller in soaps. The Metropolitan, who corresponds to an archbishop, is one of the great figures of Eastern Europe from a political as well as a religious point of view. I was told that he was the moving spirit in the revolutionary period after the War and that he had played a great part in securing Transylvania for the Roumanians. His house is just outside the city and is surrounded by a big park. When I entered the gate I found myself surrounded on all sides by tame deer, and as I walked up the avenue of trees there paraded a procession of gorgeous peacocks. His Grace is a picturesque figure—very tall, about fifty years of age, pale in complexion, with a neatly-trimmed beard. Dressed in a long black soutane with red *calotte*, he was an imposing prince of the Church. I have rarely seen a more benign or suaver clergyman; there was a merry twinkle in his eyes when he asked me about my experiences with Gypsies, for my friend in the introductory letter had referred to my wanderings. "You are a courageous man," said he, "to adventure yourself among the Gypsies, for the peasant

looks upon them as mangy, unclean dogs. If you go to our theatres you will often see caricatures of the Gypsies, who are always represented as buffoons and little better than the old bear of the Carpathians who dances upon the tray. Don't tell the people you are on the quest for Gypsies or else they would turn from you in scorn and say to themselves: "There goes one of those mad Englishmen with his wild ideas." The remarks of his Grace on the Gypsies emboldened me to make an impassioned defence of their race and I described their Indian origin, their wandering from east to farthest west, and ended by playing a series of Gypsy tunes for him that I had heard in a Roumanian restaurant of New York. I was glad I had brought my fiddle, for by music may one soothe even the most austere spirits. I concluded by playing a *Saeta* of Holy Week in Seville which Gypsies sing when they are carrying in the procession the Christ of the Gypsies.

The Metropolitan then gave me a most optimistic picture of the future of Roumania. Roumania, in his opinion, will make great advances because there are so many latent possibilities in the country with its agricultural land, its oil wells and mines. The real advance would be made when the government would have completed their policy of consolidating the whole Roumanian territory. "We have a noble peasantry in our land," said he, "which through no fault of its own is backward, and it will be the duty of successive governments to give it a greater share in the prosperity of a country which is principally agricultural." As we were conversing together a footman brought in a tray of the characteristic Roumanian delicacy, *dulceața*, which takes the place of our afternoon tea. *Dulceața* is a kind of jam served in little glass plates with a spoon, and after you have eaten your portion you drink a glass of water. Before he took leave of me his Grace introduced a young Greek priest to me who was to accompany me to see the sights of Sibiu.

"The *popa* will show you everything that is of historical or archæological interest, for he has made a special study

of the antiquities of Sibiu." So saying the noble Metropolitan took leave of me.

### THE SHOCKED PRIEST

The *popa* was a pale, ascetic young man dressed in a black soutane buttoned up to his neck, and he immediately started to tell me the story of the city. He had arranged a lengthy programme of sightseeing through the museums, the galleries and the churches. It was necessary, he said, to move according to plan so that we might not miss anything. I was feeling very weary, for I had been tramping a great deal the day before and I longed for a glass of whisky or some sort of alcohol which would revive me. The prospect of two or three hours' museum-visiting seemed a bleak one, so I determined I would side-track the *popa*. So I asked him to lead me to the Gypsy quarter of the town. The young priest stammered that he did not know where it was, but we could ask. I knew in my mind that the Gypsies would squat in the lower and more squalid parts of the city where originally the Wallachian serfs had lived, and so we descended from the upper, sanctified air of the Metropolitan's palace to the murky underworld of the Gypsies. My friend the *popa* did not feel comfortable and he kept on saying at intervals: "You know, I should get into a row if I was seen by one of my parishioners: I don't like doing this." Every few steps he peered around him as though he expected to see at any moment a divine arm of vengeance raised against him. Soon we had reached the quarter where every house was broken down and dilapidated. In a moment we were surrounded by Gypsy children ready to pounce upon us as prey. After the children came the mothers and the fathers to cringe and beg for alms. When I began to say some words of Romany to them they all laughed and the women pointed at the priest. He became confused and blushed like a young maiden. The Gypsy women then fired questions at him of a most intimate and embarrassing nature, and the worthy *popa* felt that he was being undressed and exposed in all his

nudity to the jeers of a host of Satan's harlots. After blushing he turned pale, and at last he rushed away through the crowd with a host of half-naked urchins at his heels. I called out to him, but he paid no attention and dashed away. As for me, I was deeply engaged in conversation with a woman who was holding a scrofulous baby. Around her were the rest of her family, and I counted twelve children. Most of them were black-haired urchins with copper-coloured complexions, but there were among them a little boy and a little girl who were as fair as any Saxon. Here is a problem for a biologist, but I prefer to leave it to the Pied Piper. Luckily I had a few lei on me to pacify the Gypsy children, so I threw them out into the middle of the crowd and in the mêlée I managed to make my escape.

There was one man in Sibiu who filled me with wonder and interest. This was Doctor Constantin Popa, a well-known lawyer of the town whom I met by chance in the very select restaurant Hager, where I was entertained by some friends. In the restaurant there was a Roumanian Gypsy violinist called Alecsandru whose duty it was to play *Învărtitas*, *Horas* and other Roumanian dances with his band for the guests. One night when I was there with my friends I noticed a large man sitting drinking with boon companions at the other side of the room. He was becoming more and more excited and the waiters replenished his glass every moment. He was the celebrated Doctor Popa, the great supporter of the Liberal leader Bratianu in this part of Roumania, and it was his habit to come here in the evening and drink and be merry until the small hours of the morning. Doctor Popa wanted Gypsy music, but it had to be Gypsy music played with fire and emotion. That night poor, wan-faced Alecsandru was off colour and his playing did not satisfy the doctor. "Go to hell, you cursed Tzigan," he shouted: "here is a thousand lei if you promise me not to play any more to-night." The Gypsy pocketed the money and winked at me, saying in an undertone, "It is all right:

he'll soon forget and then I can play him back into a good humour." Sure enough, in a few minutes the doctor began to sing and Alecsandru crept round the back of his chair and accompanied him. Soon the lawyer had his arms round the Gypsy's neck and was kissing him on both cheeks. The voice of Doctor Popa was a rich bass and it echoed through the room as he sang song after song, working up in a crescendo of emotion. According to my friends, he is one of the most famous singers in the country, and when the old King of Roumania used to come to Sibiu the first request he made was for Doctor Popa to sing. There was a tragic air about that man, and he reminded me of a Hungarian more than a Roumanian : one of those rugged Magyar nobles who in order to conceal some secret, devouring sorrow, carouse, dance and sing away their substance with Gypsies. Only that morning, my friends told me, he had spat blood and his doctors had diagnosed consumption. Yet here he was striving to forget his fate in the rage of a drunken orgy. Soon everyone in the restaurant had been drawn into his ambit, and in a lordly manner he stood drinks for all of us. Beside him was sitting a *popa*, or priest, but a very different one to my young ascetic friend who had run away from the Gypsies : he was the essence of worldliness, and there was a roguish twinkle in his eye as he used to fill the glass of our lawyer host. He did not blush when Doctor Popa told stories that for grossness outdid Rabelais or Aretino ; no, he merely smiled and turned up his eyes. He knew that the doctor's grossness was only an excrescence of his nature and sprang from his desire to escape from himself. He whispered to me : "Take Alecsandru's fiddle and play to him and he will sublimate himself in song."

I shall always remember the voice of that magnificent wreck of a man.

*Săliște—Singing Town of the Roumanians*

**A**FTER leaving Sibiu I tramped on foot the thirty kilometres that separated me from Săliște, a tiny town that nestles at the foot of the Carpathian mountains. I was eager to visit Săliște, because everyone had said to me that for its size it had produced more great men than anywhere else in Roumania. It has always been a centre of folk-lore and folk-music and many call it the singing town of the Roumanians. On the way I met a youngish man who, when he heard that I was going to Săliște to see the folk costumes and hear the songs, offered me his house and his table. The man, whose name was Oresanu, was an Inspector of finances in the town and a great lover of music. I was delighted to accept his kind offer of hospitality, though I should have preferred to forage freely for myself and sleep *à la belle étoile* in the broiling weather, but Oresanu would take no denial, for he was a true Roumanian, and hospitality to the stranger seems to be one of the cardinal virtues of that country. As we tramped along the road Oresanu gave me some gruesome descriptions of the Great War as it affected Transylvania. He had fought in the Roumanian Army and had gone through the disastrous days when General Mackensen had inflicted the defeat which smashed up the army. When we came to a small village called Orlat he told me that his brother was killed in a terrible battle which took place there between the Roumanians and the Austro-Hungarians. The Roumanians were on the plain and at the mercy of the enemy who were on the heights. Though many inhabitants of the village perished in the battle and survivors tell harrowing tales of suffering, on all sides to-day we see beautiful gardens full of flowers. The birds in Orlat sing sweeter than elsewhere, and the



rich meadowland, with the towering mountains beyond, takes away any sad thoughts that enter our minds.

As we arrived at Săliște a marriage procession was passing through the street. At the head was a flute-player to welcome the married pair, neither of whom looked a day older than eighteen. Oresanu has his quarters in a farmhouse, and here he insisted on giving me up his room while he slept in the kitchen. The farm-house is very old and rustic-looking, with thick, bulging walls and a wooden ladder arrangement outside if you want to go up to the rooms on the first floor, but Oresanu is a man of taste and he has furnished his rooms in the traditional style, with embroidered cushions and rugs, and dozens of jugs of peasant pottery hung round the ceiling of the rooms. He is one of the officials drafted into Transylvania by the Roumanian Government from the old country and, as he told me, they feel rather like outposts in a foreign country, for there is a good deal of difference between the Roumanians of Transylvania and those of old Roumania. He and his colleagues are part of that policy of Roumanizing Transylvania, which is being so energetically pursued, and it remains to be seen how the Roumanians of Transylvania will accept the domination of those who have come into their country and taken the jobs.

One of my first duties at Săliște was to visit the *popa*, to whom I had been given a letter of introduction from a friend in Sibiu. I was interested to see what the house of a priest of the Greek Church was like, and I imagined I should find his residence and his mode of life closely similar to that of an Irish parish priest in the country. To my surprise I discovered the house of Săliște's *popa* to be a most luxurious and modern one, surrounded by a big garden. When I arrived there was a party going on and I soon found myself in the midst of a gay mob of young men and girls. The wife of the *popa* was a very pretty woman, black-haired, with white skin and very red lips and white teeth.

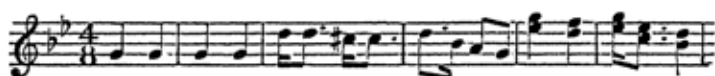
I was intensely relieved, for I had forgotten that Greek *popas* could marry, and I had expected to meet an ascetic with long white hands and the temperament of a Tor-

quemada, whereas here was a beautiful woman worthy to grace the smartest salon in Paris. Doctor Borgia, the *popa*, was a most worldly-looking man, with a bright sense of humour. As soon as he saw my violin he made me go into another room with his wife and play music, and his parting word to me was: "Now don't go and put too many romantic thoughts into my wife's head with your music. Violinists are always dangerous."

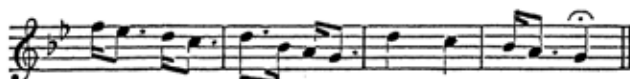
With the wife of the *popa* was a young girl called Țintea, one of the most beautiful Roumanian girls I had ever seen. She was dressed in the national costume of the region, which consisted of a white dress all embroidered in black, with a black apron of lace. The bodice of her dress was, in contrast, made of coloured embroidery. She was the characteristic Transylvanian rustic beauty: small and slight in figure—a *fausse maigre*—with pale complexion, black eyes, black hair and arched black eyebrows. Around her head she fastened the white scarf that every Roumanian maiden must wear. I was told that every girl has a different way of wearing her scarf and she can declare many subtle things according to the manner of draping it around her head. Young girls in Roumania are not timid, for their whole education leads them to be witty in repartee with the opposite sex, and Țintea was no exception. She bantered me unmercifully on my rather bedraggled appearance and called me a bear-tamer on holiday. I retorted by telling her that I preferred fair-haired girls to dark-haired ones. This did not please her, for she started a tirade against golden-haired ones that shocked me by its vehemence. "None of the men here will look at a black-haired girl," she said, "when a fair Saxon is in the offing." Her tirade made me think of the Sicilian maiden with the black eyes who exclaims in one of her *ciuri* or folk-poems:

"You say that I am black," she cries: "and what of that? Black writing looks well on white paper, black spices are worth more than white curds, and while dusky wine is drunk in a glass goblet the snow melts away unregarded in the ditch." I do not think Țintea need fear the competition of her Saxon cousins, for the graces are all

on the side of the Roumanian maid. She is, in fact, the nearest approach to the Latin woman, but with more subtle refinements of feature and less majesty in her countenance than the Roman maiden. Mrs. Jacob, the wife of a professor at the Institute of the town, was the true matron: she wore a more severe costume with a black veil around her head. With her were two young daughters whom she ordered to sing unpublished *doinas* for me. When one girl finished a song her sister began another, and so the afternoon lengthened itself into the evening. One of the *doinas* fascinated me by its melancholy beauty, and when I asked the girls about it they told me it was by a native of Săliște called Oancea, who has published collections of the folk-music of this region<sup>1</sup>:



De-ar fi lu-mea De-ar fi lu-mea de hartie dor, dor,



dor, dor, do-ru-le.

The *popa* told me many stories about the peasants and their customs. He said that it was the rule for men to wear beards, and a clean-shaven man would arouse suspicion in a village community. "I am sure the girls have already told you this," he added, looking at me slyly. I had never noticed any indiscreet attention being drawn to my smooth face, but I had only shaved occasionally when I was in the towns and that would explain my immunity from criticism. The *popa* also told me that for a folklorist Roumania and Transylvania were inexhaustible in songs and poems, for the peasant can never look at a tree or a flower without singing of its beauty.

"Their music is sad, for they have endured centuries of slavery under the Boyars when it was only possible to sing their woes to the rocks and the forests. The centuries of

<sup>1</sup> N. Oancea, *Căntece Poporale Românești*, Sibiu, 1924.

bondage have given them a suspicious nature and one that is easily roused to insane revenge."

It was late at night when I took my leave of my hospitable friend the *popa* and his charming wife and set out to find my host, Oresanu. I walked through the village, searching in every inn and café I could find. At last I met him by chance. He was in the middle of a group of men and women who were dancing on the *Bătătură* or dancing-floor outside an inn. The name *Bătătură* is given to the ground which has become hard owing to the dancing. In the middle some peasants were dancing the dance called "Învârtită," an intricate rhythm which was vigorously stamped as well as played by two fiddlers and a flute-player near by. The tune of the "Învârtită" was as follows:



As the fiddlers fiddled and the bystanders clapped their hands some of them sang words to the song and made it into a quasi-dramatic performance. There was one man who had the functions of a master of ceremonies and he directed the musicians and the dancers. Oresanu told me that the master of ceremonies must see to it that no girl is left without a partner, for that would be a grave dereliction of his duty.

After the dance was over I walked back with Oresanu to his house. Every step we took brought fresh visions before our eyes. At one moment I heard a young man serenading a girl who was up on a balcony like a rustic Juliet. The *doina* was the following tune:



Then another song was by Goga, a national poet of Roumania, with the refrain :

"Dorurile mele n'au intruchipare ;  
Dorurile mele s'frunze pe cărare."  
"My desires have no personification :  
My desires are leaves on the paths.  
beaten by the wind and crushed."

Another poem spoke of lovers wandering through the woods :

"Woods, dear woods of mine :  
tell not a living soul  
that I have spent the summer here  
with my fair love beside me :  
leave it to the leaf to tell  
how it sheltered me in its bower :  
leave it to the branches to tell  
how they awakened our desire."

The moonlight night made me think of Shakespeare, and I could not but feel that if the bard were alive to-day, he would lay the scene of his Romantic Comedies here rather than in Italy. To-day there is not singing in the streets of the Italian towns as in the past. It is in the East where there is less modern life that young men still serenade their lady-love in the traditional way.

Even in my bed in the farm-house, where Oresanu, the Finance Inspector, had his quarters, I continued to hear the songs repeated along the streets and a twang of string instruments. From the window I could see the swain : he was about eighteen years of age with dark hair, and he was dressed in snow-white blouse with leather belt, and below his tight-fitting trousers he wore queer sandal-shaped shoes, and on his head he had a cap of skin called the *căciula*. As for the maiden up in her attic, she lets down, I am sure, her white head-veil with a note for him in its folds. As I said before, the veil is used by the girls for many purposes, and to the Roumanian maiden it is as important as Isolde's scarf—a symbol and pledge of love.

## CHAPTER XXX

### *Nomad Gypsies*

"One day in the shade of a willow-tree laid,  
I came upon Gypsies three,  
As through the sand of wild moorland  
My cart toiled wearily."

—LENAU.

I HAD left Sibiu in the morning and found myself wandering along the dusty road towards the town of Fagăras which was to be my next halting-place. I met many peasants along the road and stopped here and there to have a chat with them, but never a Gypsy did I see. I knew that bands of nomadic Gypsies had been seen in some of the villages, but the peasants did not enlighten me. They merely frowned when I mentioned the word *tzigan* and cursed under their breath.

The peasant does not like the *tzigan* except when he is under the spell of the latter's rhythm. When there are nomad bands about he is uneasy: he sees that his children are locked up safely in the cottage and he keeps a sharp look out for any missing hen or duck.

I began to repeat Lenau's poem of "The Three Gypsies" aloud to myself as a consolation. Where are those Gypsies? They are the most elusive people in the world: here to-day, there to-morrow, they vanish as suddenly as they come, leaving not a trace behind them. The country people know when they will appear again in their district, for the Gypsy nomad always follows the same circular route and it is possible to tell by calculation when he will appear again.

At various villages such as Porumbac I stopped for refreshment and rest, for the heat was infernal. At last in the evening when near Arpas I saw a crowd of people in the distance.

When I came near them I found it was a Gypsy camp with tents, horses, carts and about thirty Gypsies. They were a motley crew and looked like a savage tribe from Africa. Some of them were seated around fires over which they were cooking the stew.

The sight was a striking one : the sun was setting and its rays lit up the scene in red ; at the side were the blue Carpathian mountains and all around were the fields full of corn and maize. The carts were drawn up in the background and the horses and donkeys were browsing contentedly. The men were mostly tall and dressed in dirty white tunics and tight-fitting trousers. Some of them wore over the tunic a short leather coat with fur on the inside, which, I imagine, was of service to them when they were up in the mountains. Most of them wore broad-brimmed sombreros which gave them the air of Spanish Gypsies, but there were a few who had the characteristic astrakhan caps. Without exception they all wore their hair very long and some had in addition matted beards which gave them the appearance of wild men of Borneo.

The men were decidedly more handsome than the women, and more affable. The latter were small and wizened. They all bore traces of the wandering life and the burdens that make women age before their time. Among the wandering tribes a woman of twenty-eight is already old and her skin is like tanned leather. She has to endure a double strain, for in addition to organizing the economic life of the tents she is in a continual state of pregnancy. There seemed to be countless small children about : here and there they hopped and jumped as merry as crickets—queer, dark-eyed little goblins without a stitch of clothes on them. They rolled about in the dust, they chased one another round the tents and became so boisterous that it was hard to distinguish them from the lean dogs of the tribe. By a curious tradition the Gypsies never put any clothes on their children until they reach the age of about ten years.

The women had not the slightest trace of what we call decency : several of them were naked down to their waist

and were busy giving suck to avid infants. Two others seated in front of a tent were attentive to another task : each had a small girl's head in her lap and the operation consisted in snapping the livestock that haunt the hair of Gypsies.

One of the queerest personages that greeted me was a little old man dressed in a long baggy white tunic with huge sleeves who was squatting in the front of a tent. His white beard gave him a venerable aspect, but he had the wildest eyes I have ever seen. When I approached the band he got up and hobbled over to me. When I spoke he did not seem to hear me and I had to shout to him in Romany. Then he began to apostrophize me in a high falsetto voice that became a shriek. A few other men came up and asked me what I wanted and led me over to one of the tents where I was addressed by the Chief of the tribe.

The Gypsies are supposed traditionally to choose as chief the handsomest and strongest man of the tribe ; this certainly was the case with these folk, for I have rarely seen a finer specimen. He was about six feet two in height and very swarthy in complexion. His hair was very long and curly, forming a frame to his face. There was no mean craftiness about that countenance : the nose was aquiline, the mouth firm and determined. When he looked at me his gaze seemed to plumb the depths of my mind. In costume he resembled the others except that his tunic was embroidered and in his hands he held a staff which, I was told, is a symbol of authority among the Gypsies.

When I spoke to him in Romany he became friendly to me, but without losing that cold dignity which was his chief characteristic. He told me that his band were copper-workers and wandered round the country mending the pots and pans of the peasant or else performing various other jobs. They had roamed throughout Roumania, Transylvania, and Hungary, even so far as Yugoslavia and Poland.

The tent of the Chief was not luxurious, but had a certain air of comfort about it. On the ground was a mat



woven of many colours in the Roumanian pattern and along the sides were various cushions and rough couches on which his family slept. I sat on one of them, but the Chief and his companions squatted on the ground in that uncomfortable posture which no amount of Gypsy-wandering has taught me to adopt. There is no doubt that the Gypsies are Nature's gentlemen. There is a courtesy in their manners that modern people would do well to imitate. The Chief showed not the least curiosity in his conversation with me, for he seemed to think it perfectly natural that I should wander about Transylvania and Roumania with a violin and a rucksack. He corrected me several times when I used a wrong word in Romany and asked me many questions about the Gypsies in England. Though he had never been to London he had met Gypsies who had travelled to England on the way to America. As for life in Roumania, he told me that in the summer there were no difficulties for Gypsies as Nature was kind and the days were long, but in winter their lot was grievous. Most members of the tribe then did odd jobs in the villages and towns or else manufactured wooden spoons.

It remains to be seen how the influx of modern life into the Roumanian countryside will affect the livelihood of those copper-working Gypsies. They had always been able to earn their bread as long as the peasant needed to refashion his old-fashioned pots and pans, but nowadays with the advance of industrialism and mass-production it costs less to buy a pan at Woolworths than to get an old one repaired. For the present, "Woolworths" is an unknown quantity in the Transylvanian wilds and the *Calderari* may continue to prosper.

After we had conversed for some time the Chief called to his womenfolk and a bright-eyed young girl brought in a bottle containing *pdlinka* or as the Chief called it—*recte*. Taking up a goblet that stood in a corner he poured some into it and drank it to my health and then handed it to me. The liquid looked like water, but when I tasted it I felt as though streams of molten fire were flowing within me. It was all that I could do to swallow the flaming draught

and for a long time afterwards I suffered burning pangs. It struck me as curious that my host drank to my health before he handed me the cup, but I can imagine that such a custom must have been obligatory in the old days when a host would want to prove that he had not put *drao* or poison in his guest's drink. The cup which was made of chased silver reminded me of the goblets I had seen at a Gypsy marriage at Cluj.

Later on the Chief introduced me to his wife the *Ranyi* of the tribe. She was a youngish woman, with pale complexion and intensely black hair and eyebrows. She wore a dress covered with coloured braid; around her neck were many strings of beads and a chain of gold coins; she had on very large ear-rings made of filigree work, gold bangles on her arms, and her fingers were covered with rings. Though she made me think of a heroine of the *Arabian Nights* she was not the haughty, passionate Gypsy described so often by Borrow in his Spanish ramblings. Her eye did not flash fire and there was nothing sinister about her. In appearance she was the submissive wife of the harem, at the beck and call of her lord, who could at any moment condemn her to be thrown into the Bosphorus like the girl-wife of Turkish tales. When she spoke she seemed in perpetual trepidation as though her words might anger the Chief. She generally sat beside us, absolutely motionless, looking like an idol, smoking long cigarettes. Her face had not yet begun to wrinkle under the stress of wandering life and her hands were still white. Around her played several little children, but she paid no attention to them.

Now evening had descended upon us: the fires were blazing outside the tents and the smell of stew pervaded the air on all sides. In the evening there is always bustle in a Gypsy camp: the women stand in front of the tents cooking and as they stir the pots they sing songs. Around them stand the members of the family whetting their appetites and telling one another stories. The work of the day is suspended for the moment and everyone chatters. In one tent I saw the old mother of the Chief's wife, a

witchlike Gypsy, and as she stirred the food I thought of the sinister goddess Hecate and her children. She was the exact opposite to her daughter—and a *Chovihani* if there ever was one. I found it very difficult to understand her bantering proverbs and *bons mots*, but they made the other Gypsies roar with laughter. She pointed to my fiddle which I had left in a corner and told me to play it for her : “ If you do, I’ll dance the *tanyana* for you.”

In the tent life it is these old women who rule everything : they do all the cooking and make all the preparations and everyone trembles beneath the lash of their tongue. I had visions of her on a moonlit night dancing the lascivious *tanyana* with Meg Merrilies and Cutty Sark. Gypsy food is always a problem and I must confess that I had misgivings when I squatted down beside the Chief and his wife. I was, however, agreeably surprised, for the dinner was appetizing. I had no feeling that a mouse had crept somehow or other into the stew or that the rump of the dead horse had served to make the broth. No, it was good stewed chicken and each of us was given a bone to chew. The Chief pulled out a bottle of beer and passed it round to all of us to drink in turn. At the end of the repast *reci* was served again and the Chief toasted me, calling me *pral* or brother.

Later on we sat round the fire and I took out my fiddle and played to them. As soon as the first notes of the instrument resounded through the night countless faces peered at us out of the dusk. It was an exciting experience playing to all those queer faces lit up by the glow of the fire. At first my music did not make much impression on them, for they were not musician Gypsies. Instead it was I who seemed to rise into a state of exaltation as though the influence of these wanderers began to work on me in some subtle way. And as I played I seemed to become more and more under the domination of my fiddle. I played one Gypsy tune after another ; pieces of melody and dance rhythms that I had heard once suggested themselves to me like a kaleidoscope vision. I jumbled them all together in a monstrous rhapsody without any connecting link. And

still those flaming faces stared at me : I saw them through a haze.

I could see the Chief sitting at the back removed from the others : he seemed to be wearing a crown and carrying a long staff with silver point. He was seated on a throne of skins : the old hag was in front of him circling around in the dance of the *tanyana*. Her body swayed with a curious quivering movement of the hips as though some terrible force was possessing her : her eyes seemed to start from her head and her grey hair fell in masses over her face. There was a terrible magnetic force in her dancing and it fascinated the flaming faces. Suddenly I saw a white apparition join the grotesque, indecent hag : it was a young Gypsy maiden. She was in a trance and her eyes were closed, but her body moved in rhythm with that of the old woman. On one side I saw the grotesque writhings of the emaciated form of wrinkled age sinking under the brutal possession of the god : on the other side was the girl lashing her body into the lusts of youth. Then all around I seemed to hear a low murmuring song—the cry of the men and women to the god of Nature :

MEN : "Lado ! Lado ! mroï ganga !"  
(Leda ! Leda ! be my refuge !)

WOMEN : "Pala ! Pala ! mroï pola !"  
(Sun ! sun ! be my pride.)

As I played on I lost all connection with the earth and floated above it, watching the spectacle of human life. So imperious did this rhythm of life become that little by little all the world joined in—the Russians with their gopaks, the Roumanians with their Brâu, the Spaniards with their Jota, the Italians with their Tarantella, the Arabs with their Dervish Dance, the Negroes with their jazz. And above the maelstrom I saw the symbol of the hag and the maiden—the dance of death became the dance of life.<sup>1</sup>

When I finished playing it was as if something had snapped within me and left me limp and lifeless : the flaming faces had disappeared. The fire had burnt low,

<sup>1</sup> For the Gypsy hymn to Nature cf. A. Collocchi.

and through a dark haze I saw the Chief ; he looked older and sadder. Why is it that Gypsies are so melancholy at times as though they upheld a weight of sorrow in their minds ?

The whole night seemed to have changed.

Near by a voice started to sing a slow song and the Gypsies by me started to hum it all together. In the distance through the dark night I saw the glow of the little fires in front of each tent and many huddled forms waiting, waiting like watchers in the desert.

I said to myself :

“ And they taught to me, those Gypsies three,  
When life is saddened and cold,  
How to dream or play, or puff it away,  
Despising it threefold ! ”

*Sleeping in a Gypsy Tent*

**A**S the Chief of the Gypsies received me so cordially I determined to spend the night with him, and I asked him for permission to lie by the fire, but he insisted on my sleeping in one of the tents. The Gypsy tents in Transylvania are very primitive and consist of just three stakes and a covering. The covering, which is made of rough stuff of dark colour, is spread over the frame, composed of the three stakes. When the Gypsy is pitching his tent he takes the long stake and lays one end of it between the two shorter ones after placing them cross-ways. The lower end of the long stake is then held firm by two little stakes fixed in the ground. Nothing could be simpler than those Gypsy tents, which are traditional and have not changed for centuries. They were about four yards in length, and at night we were crowded. The weather was so sultry that I should have preferred to sleep in the open near the fire and I was afraid the Chief would insist on my sleeping at the back of the tent far from the entrance. Fortunately my arguments were persuasive and I was allowed to lie down just at the entrance and so escaped suffocation. In my tent were four men of rough aspect who ensconced themselves without a word at the back. I noticed with surprise that the women were excluded from our tent, and I mentally compared my present sleeping-quarters with the promiscuous hovel of my friend Rostás.

I did not spend a very pleasant night in that tent, for I was unable to sleep. It is difficult to accustom oneself at once to the medley of noises of the camp, the murmuring tones, the barking dogs, the snores and coughing; and then I felt that it was necessary to be continually on the *qui vive*. The Chief had treated me hospitably, but there

might be others who would not hesitate to rob me of what little money I had in my purse or of my fiddle. I had not yet begun to place full confidence in Gypsy hospitality, and I said to myself: "Why should they let me go unscathed? I am an interloper here: I am spying into their life and they are quite justified in attacking me."

In one tent near ours there were two men, two women and three children. One pair started a quarrel early in the night and carried their blasphemous bickering on until the early hours of the morning. The husband seemed to be in a rage about some money matter, for I heard the word *lovó* bandied about again and again. Then the woman began to jeer at him and the usual beating took place. I heard the thud of the blows resounding through the night like the sound of beating carpets, but the punishment did not stop the woman's tongue, which continued to spit venom like a viper until she became exhausted and out of breath. The scene reminded me of the famous Transylvanian Gypsy ballad of "Black Voda" which wandering folk love to tell. Black Voda was in love with the wife of another Gypsy who was neglected by her husband and he bought her a new dress. When the husband came home and saw the new dress given by her lover he flew into a rage and cast her into the fire, but she continued to shriek at him in her piercing voice from the depths of the fire. Here the issue was complicated by the children, who began to howl as soon as they heard the beating, and soon there was a regular concert of yelling. The inhabitants of the tents near by then shouted at them and eventually two women crept in to establish peace.

In the morning the Gypsies rose early and set to work at their pots and pans. In front of their tents they make a hole in the ground, and in this they light the charcoal which they use for their work. At one end of the hole they fix a funnel, with one end in the fire, and into the other end they insert the end of the bellows. A boy is seated near the fire and presses the bellows to increase the blaze. In a Gypsy camp it seemed to me that the little boys did most of the work and the bearded men stood by and criticized.

Gypsy children are astonishingly independent and quick-witted, for they are accustomed by their parents to fend for themselves. From three years of age a child rolls about in the ditches by himself and at five years of age he is an adept at bellows-blowing. No attempt is ever made to give those children systematic education, and as a consequence none of those Gypsies could read or write, but they were skilled in the arts of the countryside, and they were expert smiths and wood-carvers.

The Chief seemed to have a great ascendancy over everyone in the tribe, and he did not scruple to use his power when he deemed it necessary. He used to send the men off into the villages to trade in pots and pans and gather in those that needed mending. In harvest-time it was he who let out the people of his tribe on hire to the farmers to assist in gathering the crops. And when payment was made for work done he would receive the sum of money and divide it among the tribe. The Chief, in fact, owed all his position to his vigorous personality, and he was always able to impose his will on the others. There were a great many problems of Gypsy life which I should have liked to question him about, but he would not answer me and I felt that he considered me an inquisitive *busnó*. I had always been puzzled by the problem of the routes taken by the copper-workers in their wanderings. They seem to wander all over Europe at will and yet they have no maps and no guides. Most of them can neither read, write nor speak the various languages, and yet they wander by the most out-of-the-way paths without ever losing their way. Travellers have met Italian smiths in India and Hungarian smiths in the Apennines; they have gone through Russia into Asia; they have roamed the plains of Arizona to California and the uplands of Brazil into Colombia, without ever losing their way and without ever shedding their individual quality. There must exist among them some secret signs which are only understood by the brotherhood of the road and which tell them where they may expect friendly or hostile treatment. The Chief would never tell me what



those signs were, but he must have known them, for he and his tribe had travelled through the bypaths of Europe for years.

One of the commonest methods of marking the road for the Gypsies is to lay the *patteran*, and the Chief told me there were two types: one in the form of a trident † and the other which is in the form of a cross ‡. When they want to point out the way they have gone to any of their tribe, they trace these signs on the road or cut them on trees. Another form of *patteran* consists in throwing at certain cross-roads heaps of fresh grass or leaves, and when they want to indicate halting-places they scrawl up on walls the ancient Indian symbol of the swastika.

The whole question of the *patteran* is a mysterious one and many attempts have been made to solve the derivation of the word. Some say it comes from the Indian word *panth* which means "way," others derive it from the modern Greek word *patoma* which means "path." After two days with the Gypsy tribe I felt there was some possibility of my becoming intimate with them and I flattered myself that I should learn some of their secrets, but then all of a sudden they disappeared and I found myself alone. I had gone to the village in the evening to buy some wine which I wished to drink with the Chief, and I was not absent from the camp more than an hour. To my amazement I found not a trace of tent, cart or Gypsy on my return. They had been spirited away with the suddenness of Aladdin's magic palace. Nobody seemed to know anything about them, and I never met them afterwards in my travels through Transylvania or Roumania. Why did they leave me so suddenly? Perhaps they began to distrust me and they thought it best to give me the slip, as I might be a spy who would publish to the world their secrets. The Gypsy always fears that the *busnó* will reveal him to the world, and that is why he is unwilling for the latter to photograph him. The Romany language, the tabus, the *patterans* are all protections against the hated white man, the *busnó*. A peasant whom I questioned on the disappearance of the tribe told me that when the Gypsies leave a place where

they have been staying, they go in a certain direction at random and then turn right about and go half a league that way before they finally depart on their right road. "You won't find them," said he, "for they go like hares in the undergrowth, and sometimes they seem to fade into thin air. No wonder : why, the dogs of Gypsies are the plague of our countryside with their thieving and poaching. They need to fly away or we should be after them."

I could not help sympathizing with the elusive Gypsies who take such pains to preserve their mystery from the Gentile. The tribe I had met did not strike me as a thieving rabble, and they were certainly not warlike or criminal in their intentions towards the traveller. They were shy of provoking quarrels and the peasants said they were a peaceful crowd. They flitted away, as Walter Pater said of Leonardo da Vinci, "like one on a secret errand," and I was left to wonder at the strange, problematic nature of those Gypsies from far-off India who are part of our Western civilization and yet at the same time so far removed from it.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### *Fagăras*

#### MAINLY ABOUT ROUMANIAN PEASANT CUSTOMS.

#### WHY DID THE GYPSIES EAT THEIR CHURCH?

**A**FTER trying to find the Gypsy trail in vain, I continued my course towards the town of Fagăras, which was to be a halting-place for me on my journey to Bucharest. After some hours' walking I reached the town and set about finding lodgings of a more normal kind than the Gypsy tents I had slept in out in the country. Life in the country town of Fagăras seemed painfully normal to me and I felt I was back in a country town in Ireland with its central square and whitewashed houses. I have never seen a more inconsistent place : at first it gave me the impression of being merely a market town with only a peasant population, but soon I discovered that it was the base of a regiment, and I saw smart officers parading in the square with ladies in tulle dresses of the latest fashion. It was all very incongruous and the whitewashed houses seemed to look with dismay on this invasion of their simple life. In the morning, if it was fair day, the square was full of peasants' booths and the roads were thronged with heavy ox-drawn waggons ; in the evenings the *demi-monde* began to appear in the cafés which have sprung up beside the whitewashed houses, and the spurious city atmosphere of bars, with jazz, *cocottes* and gigolos, reminded me that we were not far from Bucharest.

I went to one of the cheaper hotels in the square, which had been recommended to me by a waiter in Sibiu. A queer, ramshackle place it was. There was no porter to be

seen, so I wandered into a yard at the back to see whether I could attract somebody's attention.

There was not a soul about, except various snarling, mangy dogs and some ducks. Presently a girl came out of a room on the ground floor with an officer; she had nothing on but a silk *peignoir* of very short dimensions; she belonged to the staff of the hotel and led me to my room on the second floor. As she walked up the stairs in front of me the vision of her naked thighs seemed to me so incongruous that I burst out laughing. She showed me into a large double room which queerly enough was adjacent to two other rooms marked "Doctor No. 1" and "Doctor No. 2." There seemed to be a continual promenade of girls into those two rooms. When the servant left me I immediately tried the lock on my door and found to my dismay that there was no key. Suppose one of those girls made a mistake and came in here, what should I do? My alarm increased when I discovered that the electric-light fittings had been wrenched from their sockets and there was no possibility of obtaining light. Worse and worse; if one of those girls took the wrong turning in the dark at dead of night, and came in here expecting to find her medical adviser . . . visions arose before me of Don Quixote's adventure in the inn when Maritornes mistook him for the muleteer. I had no relish for a repetition of the noble knight's experience, so I tried to ring for the maid. Alas! the bell-rope gave way and remained in my hands! . . .

Downstairs the hotel seemed more normal. In the large café I found many cheap commercial travellers and farmers with a good sprinkling of military men. At once I became an object of curiosity on account of my foreign appearance, and ceaseless questions were fired at me. I did not tell them of my Gypsy experiences, for I have always encountered suspicion when the word Gypsy is mentioned. If I had said I was Gypsy-hunting they would have convinced themselves that I was a journalist spy. I soon went out into the square, for the café was very stuffy.

In the evening there was a continual procession of young

girls and young men. They walked round and round the square in monotonous sequence, chatting away. The physical type varied between the Saxon blue eyes and fair hair and the dark hair and brown eyes of the Roumanian.

I sat for some hours in a Saxon café—a very clean and wholesome place where no alcoholic drink was sold, but which boasted a billiard-table. It was full of young men who were playing various games or else reading the papers. They all made me think of the north of Europe, and they were so taciturn in their dignity that I could not imagine their ever displaying any emotion in their lives. The girl who served behind the counter was plump and pretty, but without a trace of feminine grace: she was dressed in subdued homespun and not once did she give any of us the tiniest smile of welcome. How different from the coquettish Roumanian girls I had met at Cluj! At last I became wearied of the respectable dullness of the Saxon café and went out in the square.

It was a beautiful starlit night and the majority of the populace were still walking around the square in small groups. Fagăras, though a small town, is not devoid of gaiety. The modern shops give it an air of prosperity, and from several outdoor restaurants I heard the inevitable Gypsy bands. They were allowed to play outside until midnight, when they had to retire within the cafés and close the shutters so as not to disturb the sleeping townspeople. At this hour the two rival hotels, the "Mercur" and the "Weber," blazed their bands at one another, and I am sure that only the Gypsy who can produce a big rough tone gets a job in the bands. They were very disappointing Gypsies, for they mostly played fantasies on Verdi or Puccini's operas very badly, or else jazz tunes, missing the syncopated rhythm altogether. It was disappointing not to find a genuine Roumanian Gypsy among them: they were mostly Hungarian Tzigans of a very mixed kind, without any fire in their playing.

In the "Mercur" Hotel I met some agreeable Roumanian farmers of the yeoman class who had come in from the country on business. They were seated with

various men who looked like clerks, and invited me to their table when they saw that I was a lonely stranger. They were, as usual, very eager to hear news of America, for several of them had relatives in the Middle West. America to them seemed Paradise in view of the economic difficulties of life to-day in Roumania, and they were all very depressed at the limitations imposed on immigration by the authorities in Washington. In discussing the problems of his country, the Roumanian reminded me of the Spaniard; he will tell you many tales of hopeless misery and put all the blame down to the government, but when you take his opinions as your norm he will turn in a sudden fit of patriotism and contradict you for generalizing about his country.

I am sure that a great evolution is taking place among the Roumanian rural population owing to the trend of politics. The Government of Maniu has given the peasant a taste of power, and he will soon want to play the tyrant. I was surprised to hear a good deal of Bolshevistic talk in our group, because I had not noted it before in my travels through the country.

One of the men was a clerk from Bucharest who was staying at Fagăras with relations. He was not prepossessing in appearance when one set him beside the full-blooded farmers, but he led them by the nose when he started to talk politics. He might just as well have come from Burnley or Cardiff as Roumania; he was underfed, undersized, with an unhealthy, pimply face, and he wore the threadbare, shiny-trousered suiting that we associate with the clerk who has to sit hour after hour on a stool in a counting-house. He began by trying to impress me that he understood all about the workers' conditions in England and in Germany; then from that he worked on to his own country. He gave me a gruesome picture of life among the Roumanian workers.

According to him, there was worse suffering in the streets of Bucharest than in any city, in spite of the gorgeous motor-cars and the glittering international society. He said that countless peasants, cherishing a blind belief in the

justice of the Crown and Government, used to travel hundreds of miles from their villages up to the capital to expose their wrongs before officials. There they would remain weeks and weeks, half-starving, camping in the street, poorer than the ragged Gypsies, and in the end they would have to return home without having their case heard.

The little man worked himself up into a paroxysm of rage in his abuse of the Government, and the majority of his hearers looked at him with the wide-eyed wonder of the simple man of the earth who is dazzled by the superior knowledge (as he thinks) of the city man. There was nobody to answer the revolutionary arguments save one very competent farmer who was a strong supporter of the present Government. The rest all hung their heads when the clerk had finished, but the fat man started to argue with him, very hotly at that, and ended by calling him a Jewish Bolshevik from Poland. It was a long time before the conversation veered away from Lenin, whom the clerk considered the greatest benefactor humanity has ever known. I do not think they would ever have calmed down if the little man had not quoted Karl Marx on Christianity as the religion of the Capitalist and said that Lenin was greater than Christ. At this the whole party became very shocked and the little man saw he had gone too far.

The Roumanian peasant will not suffer people to interfere with his religion and Bolshevistic propaganda will not, in my opinion, make any headway, for a time at any rate, in a country so attached to the Orthodox Church.

I had been struck by the devotion of the people all the way through my ramblings, and here in Fagăras, after all the fierce diatribes uttered by the revolutionists, these simple men started to talk to me about their beliefs. It was as if I had suddenly been spirited backwards hundreds of years, and to my great surprise the little man listened to them without making sarcastic comment.

As far as I could judge, the position of the *popa* or priest is as strong to-day as when Mrs. Gerard or Boner wrote their books, and a great deal of latitude is allowed to him.

In a village he may act as he wishes without calling down, on himself the reprobation of his parishioners, because he is regarded as a symbol. Unlike the Saxon pastor he does not have to set an example by his personal character. There is a very sarcastic proverb which says : " Face zice popa dar unce face el "—" Do as the *popa* says, but do not act like him." Boner, in his book on Transylvania, describes seeing a group of Roumanian peasants dragging their struggling *popa* towards the church. They said they were going to lock him up till Sunday morning so that he might have recovered from his drunkenness and be able to say Mass.

The peasants at Fagăras with whom I conversed did not bear out the statements made by the writers I have quoted, but we should remember that a recent great movement of reform swept away many abuses of the Orthodox Church. I could not but entirely agree with the farmers, for I had been the guest of the *popa* of Săliște and the Metropolitan of Transylvania. I cannot imagine any unruly *popa* existing long in the diocese ruled by that great and austere man.

From religion the conversation turned to death, and I tried to describe for them the Irish tradition of the Wake and the Caoine. They immediately told me of the analogous dirges that the Roumanians sing at death called *bocete*.

These *bocete* are sung to the dead body after death, but they are usually performed by paid mourners who exaggerate to the utmost the display of grief in order to get better paid. The idea of indulging in these shrieking songs is to make a last attempt to wake the dead. The singers approach the body on either side and sing into his ear a rambling account of all that he is leaving : his farm, his house, his wife and children ; and they do their best to rouse him from his sleep by their cries. The task is a very arduous one and for that reason paid mourners, who must always be women, are employed. The lamentations must go on without ceasing for a whole day and night in the room where the corpse is laid, and the singers relieve one another. The idea is more artificial than the Irish



Caoine, which is the spontaneous shriek of the mother who has lost her child. It is as in the case of Maurya's Caoine in Synge's play, *Riders to the Sea*; the cry of helpless humanity in the face of Destiny, and after the cry has echoed away, Maurya says simply: "There isn't anything more the sea can do to me." The Roumanian *bocete* are far more closely allied to the Spanish *endechas* or dirges which were sung by professional mourners. But even in Spain, I have never heard of the weeping being kept up for so long as in Roumania.

The Roumanian death scene and funeral resembles in some points the Gypsy ceremony, but in the latter, grief is more unrestrained and animal, for instead of hope and belief in religion there is only the Pagan coldness of death and extinction. There are many similar practices in the ceremonies of both races; for instance, like the Gypsies, the Roumanians place offerings of bread and wine on the tomb to give strength to the weary traveller on his way.

Beza, the well-known Roumanian writer, tells a folk-story to prove how earthly are the needs of the soul after it has left the body. Death once came to take away a man who was very unwilling to die. So urgent were his entreaties that the Spirit of Gloom gave him a year. When the year was up, he came and carried off his victim through the woods to a great river. The man asked leave to drink from the water, but as he bent his head forward, Death took his Soul away and the Body fell in the mud. Some time after when the Soul was with his Guardian Angel they both saw an object lying on the bank on the other side of the river, and when they approached it was seen to be the Soul's body. The angel then told the Soul to get into the Body, but it cried out piteously: "Oh, how foolish I was to wish to remain in the Body: how ugly it is and how free I am now!"

Beza, who comes from Macedonia—the richest treasure-house for the folklorist, says that the soul does not sever its connection with the world of the living even though it has passed to the abode of the blest. It may return and worry considerably the people of our world. If it comes

back, it generally takes the form of a spider or a snake, and for this reason the peasants are in awe of these animals. Who knows if the superstition in our more unimaginative Northern countries that it is unlucky to kill a spider may not be derived from a Macedonian source? Among the ancient Greeks, the spider represented a less terrifying person, the boastful Arachne, who thought she could spin as much as Pallas Athene, and for her presumption was transformed into the sinister insect.

The Gypsies in their death beliefs hold even more sinister views of the interference of the dead, and it is customary for the heirs to take their fathers' possessions out of the tent when he is dying lest he might covet them after death. They also hold, in contrast to the Roumanians, that the soul does not leave the body until the flesh has disintegrated. For this reason the Gypsies make a hole in the coffin. This is paralleled among the Roumanian peasants, for they cut two holes in the coffin so that the dead man may hear the frantic *bocete* sung by the mourners on the way to the graveyard.

It is also customary among the Roumanian peasants to distribute seven copper coins and seven pieces of bread with lighted candles sticking in them to beggars who gather around the tomb. This is an interesting superstition because it concerns the strange journey of the dead up to heaven. In Norway the peasants believe that after death we must all traverse desolate, burning plains: in other countries it is held that the poor corpse has got to struggle through an immense jungle over cruel thorns that lacerate his feet.

The Roumanians in all their mythology and folk-lore are a kindly people: the journey from the city of Life to the world of the Blest is fully supervised, and at intervals there are toll-houses where nothing is accepted but those seven copper coins. The custom recalls the ancient Greek belief that it was necessary to put an obol between the teeth of a dead man to enable him to pay Charon for ferrying him across the River Styx. Charon, however, was a brutal fellow and, according to Dante, the souls shivered

in terror of his pole. He would not have suited the Roumanians with their gentle journey through the forest to the river boundary.

The thoughts of death winged me far away from the simple folk of Fagăras, and the scraps of folk-lore they had told me kept resounding in my mind like stray musical themes, waiting to be welded into a harmony. Whenever a peasant tells of a superstition, it turns over and over in my mind and like a snowball it grows larger and larger as parallel customs from other countries suggest themselves.

By now it was two o'clock in the morning, and all the party had left. I found myself the sole guest in the café, but the shabby Gypsy band was still there. At this hour they played in hang-dog fashion, for my peasant's dress did not raise their hopes of a generous tip. At last the atmosphere of melancholy became so oppressive that I went up to the leader and asked him to lend me his fiddle. I then rapped my bow on the desk and started off the tune of the Hortobágy which I had learned in Debrecen from Racz Jancsi. The effect was magical: they all snatched their instruments and followed me, keeping up with every unorthodox change of rhythm I made. Then without a word I passed to "Czinka Panna's" *Nota*, the serenade of Lavotta, ending up with a wild *csárdás*. Not a soul was in the café at this ghostly hour except a sleepy waiter who watched us unmoved from the opposite side of the room. We played for ourselves and I am sure those Hungarian Gypsies mentally thanked me for rousing them up to Dionysiac exaltation. During the evening they had played for hour after hour to a stolid audience of Saxon and Roumanian peasants who took no interest in them. They were Hungarian Gypsies for whom the Magyar music was as breath to their nostrils.

At the end, of course, I became a lordly *rai* again and called for the glasses and the bottle of wine. All of them, except the double bass, were from Hungary, and they eked out a precarious existence in Fagăras playing in different cafés.

The next morning I went with the leader to visit some

Roumanian Gypsy friends of his who lived in hovels near the church, mainly occupying themselves with the manufacture of wooden spoons and baskets. It was curious to notice the contrast between the Roms of both countries : my friend was by no means the characteristic arrogant Tzigan of the Magyar, but a downcast creature with little spirit in him. Yet when we were with those Roumanian Gypsies he seemed to grow in stature, and his manner became quite arrogant as he spoke to them. His contempt, I know, sprang from two causes : first of all he was a musician Gypsy and one belonging to that class, however badly he may play, looks down on all the other Gypsy professions. Secondly, he was a Magyar Gypsy and in his own estimation degrees higher than a wretched Wallachian Rom.

After leaving these people we went to visit the majestic castle of Fagăras which was built in 1613 as a fortress for this part of the world. It is surrounded by a deep and extensive moat which is now grazing land and on one side there is a beautiful line of poplars which with their leaves form a thin lacework through which one sees the castle from the road. Inside there is the Chapel of Maria Theresa where she used to pray on her visits to the town. I asked the Gypsy whether he had ever heard of her, but he confessed to complete ignorance. I told him about her reforms, how she tried to settle the Gypsies of Hungary on the land and make them into agricultural workers. But he seemed amused at my story : " Surely the good queen could not think that the Gypsy brothers would ever cultivate the fields. Since the earliest times no Rom has ever done agricultural work." I then told him the story of what happened when the Gypsies did sow corn. One day a youth who saw the stalks quivering in the breeze rushed to the tribe crying out that the corn was running away : so the Roms went out with their scythes and cut it down. And that is why there is no corn among the Gypsies. It was my friend's gesture of surprise at what he considered was Maria Theresa's folly that suggested to me the story of the corn which is still very common among Gypsies in

the east of Europe. It is one of the many grotesque stories that the Roumanian peasants love to invent at the expense of the Gypsy who is the everlasting *pagliaccio* or clown.

Another story of the same type came into my head and I said to my companion :

"Why have the Gypsies no church, O Rom? You do not know? Well, I shall tell you :

"Once upon a time in Roumania, when the Gypsies were more religious than they are to-day, they had a beautiful church of stone. There was nothing unusual about this, for as you know, Gypsies are very good builders, though they generally let their wives do the heavy mason work. This strong, well-built church of stone was their pride.

"Now the Wallachs down the road had a church, too, but it was a strange building, for it was all made of bacon and sausages. At first the Gypsies strutted contemptuously in front of the Wallachs and asked them had they ever seen a real church : if not, then let them go up the road and see theirs made of stone. But then a spiteful breeze would blow across, bringing to the Gypsy noses a delicious scent of bacon—and delicious it must have seemed to them after their meal off carrion dog.

"At last the day came when the Gypsies had not enough strength to resist the temptation. They agreed to exchange with the Wallachs. As soon as they took possession of the appetizing church they started straightway to nibble away : now a piece of a door, now a rafter, now a pillar : even the *Gako* himself could not resist eating the pulpit and the altar-piece.

"In a short time there was nothing left and the Gypsies thus remain for ever without a church.

"So you, Mr. Gypsy, have eaten your church and you won't get one again. I am glad to tell you this story now because it redounds to the credit of the poor Wallachs who could not call their soul their own in those days and yet were able to get a fine stone church to pray in.

"But you should remember that both stories were probably invented by a Wallachian peasant who had been

cheated in the fair of Fagăras by a Gypsy and determined as a revenge to fetter him for ever to a tale.

“And well he has done it, for two of the great faults attributed to your race, my dear Gypsy, have always been—impulsive folly and gluttony.”

Curious to relate my Gypsy friend took up the story of the church in an entirely different light.

When I had finished he looked at me quizzically and said :

“Ah, sir, you told that story with a purpose: you wanted to make me smell in the air the delicious bacon and sausage.

“Come, I know a tavern down yonder side street where we can get a good substitute for *gulyás*. You have made me hungry and your generosity will not refuse me.”

As we entered the inn I murmured to myself the Gypsy proverb: “Bacon makes bold.”

*An Uncomfortable Adventure with Gypsies*

“**A** PLAGUE on my accursed feet,” thought I as I limped along the road on a broiling day feeling that every step I took led me nearer to the infernal regions. I wished I had never left the comparative comfort of Fagăras with its taverns for this desert. My feet pained me, for my heavy boots caused blisters to spring up on my big toe. Now I know the reason why Gypsies bury a good pair of boots with a corpse. They know that the dead must wander many a weary mile over burning plains as I am doing now, and well-fitting boots are necessary. Boots are objects of veneration to the wandering folk because so much depends upon them. Any man who intends to set out on a long tramping tour should spend more money on his boots than on all the rest of his kit and on his journey money. I had set out from Italy with boots borrowed from a peasant at home and I was now suffering for my negligence, for the boots had never fitted me completely and the blisters had come. When we read fairy stories which were inspired by Gypsy wanderers we find a great many descriptions of magic shoes which carry men over hill and over dale. It was the Gypsies, I am sure, who invented the seven-leagued boots to give themselves courage on a tedious journey. Shoes are a symbol of fertility and the good things of this life, as any Gypsy will tell us. When I was at Huedin a Gypsy woman told me that the girls used to throw their shoes up on the branches of a tree to find out if they were to get married. If the shoe stuck in the branches, then the girl would find a mate within the year. Everyone knows the old nursery rhyme of the woman who lived in the shoe, but few realize its significance.

“There was an old woman who lived in a shoe;  
She had so many children she did not know what to do.”

The shoe is here the symbol of fertility, for it was the shoe which the friends of the old woman threw after her when she set out as a bride from her father's house. Such were my thoughts as I limped through the burning plain. At this broiling period of the day there was not a soul about and I had visions of siestas in cool farmhouses. At last I came to a small wood where I discovered a peasant resting in the shade. He was a fine, strapping young fellow about six feet three inches in height and as muscular as a prize-fighter. I found it difficult to understand his dialect, but we became friends and tramped on together and he told me many anecdotes of the life in the country parts of Transylvania. He was born in the village of Poplaka, near Sibiu, and had spent many years in the Carpathians, and he gave me a glowing description of the shepherd's life in the summer-time up on the heights. The shepherds live up there in huts made of loose stones and are able to control by their voices hundreds of sheep under their care. In the mountain-passes the traveller may hear in the distance the strange calls of those shepherds which sound like the note of a bird. Lower down in the valleys the peasant told me there were huts where women from the villages stay in the summer for the purpose of cheese-making. Crowds of these women live there far away from their menfolk who are with their flocks, and if one may believe the stories he told me, those women behave like the wild Bacchanalian women of Thrace. "A man who falls into the hands of those wenches," said he, "will soon die of exhaustion: they'll kill him with kindness and there is no father or husband near by to wield the lash."

Farther along the road we came across a small, pathetic man dressed in a leather coat studded with brass ornaments who was toiling along the road, dragging after him by a rope a big black bear. The bear was even more pathetic-looking than his master and he jogged along painfully, kicking up a cloud of dust as he went. My peasant friend was overjoyed to see the bear-tamer and he said to me: "We must talk to that Gypsy and persuade him to make the bear dance for us." So saying he ran up to the little



man and slapped him on the back and offered him a drink from a flask he wore round his shoulders. The Gypsy shouted with delight when he saw the flask and he tried to embrace the peasant. We then retired to the side of the road and the Gypsy began to show off his bear. First of all he took out of his pocket a small flute and played a dance, but the dusty animal did not pay much attention to him beyond giving a low grunt. Then the Gypsy began to shout excitedly at it and kick his legs about. The bear then slowly rose up on its hind paws and started to dance heavily in time to the dance tune played by the Gypsy. The bear's dance was not gay, but sad and lumbering, as though he wished to say: "Why does this stupid Gypsy make me do all these antics on this hot day? It is bad enough to toil along those dusty roads in the sun without a drop of water, without having to play the fool for a couple of mangy-looking strangers." The whole attitude of the Gypsy towards the bear was one of supreme contempt: he looked on the animal as the essence of buffoonery and he did not spare him a kick or an insult. His attitude towards the bear, in fact, reminded me of the way in which the peasant treats the Gypsy. Both are the clowns of the Roumanian countryside and their task is to provoke witty sallies in others. The Gypsy then gave me a description of the hunting and training of the bears. When the bear is caught the Gypsy heats an iron tray and when it is very hot he sets the bear upon it and takes up his fiddle or flute. The bear feels the burning pain and hops up and down on the tray, but meanwhile the Gypsy stands in front of him and plays the insistent rhythm of the dance, and gradually the bear becomes hypnotized and begins to adapt his movements to the Gypsy's playing. After many experiences of the heated tray the bear begins to associate the tune on the fiddle or flute with his hopping and as soon as the Gypsy starts to play before him he hops in time and it is no longer necessary to heat the tray. The Gypsy said that the profession of bear-tamer was no longer a profitable one in the towns of Transylvania, for the people now preferred cinemas to circuses. He was

now on his way to Bucharest, where he hoped to be able to join a roving circus. Poor bear! I thought of him ranging over the heights of the Carpathians, carrying off the sheep and mauling the shepherds' dogs without anyone to challenge his supremacy. But the peasant told me that it is difficult to find bears, for they avoid man, and with reason too, for so many hunters pursue them that there is a danger that the supply will soon be exhausted. I can imagine the poor bear saying to himself: "Alas! a few more years and my time will be up: there are too many hunters and too many Gypsies in the mountains. Formerly life was rosy, for men were afraid of me: now nobody fears me. I wish I could run away miles to avoid being captured by some odious Gypsy and made to dance for the amusement of a town rabble." In the mountains the bears are still a mystery to the Gypsy, for he associates them with wild beings of the forests who dash out from behind pine-trees and seize the unwary wanderer.

The little Gypsy bear-tamer had the most vivid imagination of any Gypsy I had ever met, and he gave me a terrifying picture of the Carpathians. In his wanderings he would collect every conceivable kind of charm, such as eagles' feathers, bears' teeth and herbs, which he would sell to the credulous peasantry. For every fever he had an antidote, consisting of some stone, plant or animal brew, and I am convinced that he made more money in the villages by his quack cures than by his performing bear. When I spoke to him about Sibiu he told me that there was a magic lake hidden high up in the Carpathians above the city. The lake, he said, was dark and sinister in its solitude, because in its depths lurks a dragon, or Ismeju, and upon its back the Devil and his assistants ride when they are preparing thunderbolts to hurl at the city of Sibiu in the plain. Near the lake the Devil holds a school in the rocks, where wizardry and witchcraft are taught to a small band of scholars. "All you have got to do if you want to join that school," said the Gypsy, "is to wander off by yourself and climb up to the mountain lake and you will be sure to meet the Devil himself. He will take

you to his school if it is not already full, for there are only ten students there. When the ten finish their study the Devil sends nine back to their homes to spread their art among the people, but he retains the tenth student to be his assistant. And may God preserve you from being the tenth, for then you would never be seen again by mortal eyes. The Devil would keep you with him in the depths of the lake, or else he would ride with you on the Ismeju through the clouds with the storm. Many of us Gypsies have been to that school, but we were too clever to be caught by the Devil, for we filled our pockets with salt, which the Devil hates, and we never forgot to make the sign of the Cross."

As the Gypsy was talking I could see that the peasant did not like his conversation, for there was too much witchcraft about it and in Roumania the folk in the country, however religious they may be, do not despise the Gypsy shaman or wizard. When the little fellow had finished, he spoke to him curtly and said that we had to leave him as we were in a hurry to get on our way. The Gypsy then began to whine and asked him if he would not buy one of his charms to bring good luck. The peasant, to my surprise, pulled out some lei and received in return a bear's tooth. "Now begone, you lousy Gypsy, and let us continue our journey in peace: we want no more of your charms and tricks." The Gypsy, without saying a word, walked off, pulling his big black bear after him.

As we were walking along I suddenly heard a confused din coming from a thickly-wooded stretch on our right. Fighting seemed to be in progress, for we heard the shrieks of women and the barking of dogs. Out of curiosity we approached the wood, and beneath the trees we saw a circle of men and women and in the middle two ragged men fighting one another. My friend the peasant wanted to hurry away, and he said: "Leave them to it: they are only filthy Gypsies and if you go near them you will only get a blow or else they will steal your purse." The fight was a fierce one and the two men were streaming blood, but what surprised me was the ferocity of their women

partisans. Each man had a band of mad-looking witches clawing at the faces of their adversaries who were defending the other man. Everyone in the camp seemed to be taking part in the struggle, even the squealing infants and the snarling, cadaverous dogs. Then suddenly a man on the outskirts of the crowd gave a shrill whistle and pointed us out to some of his companions. In a few seconds the fight broke up in disorder and the crowd transferred its attentions to us. The two wrestling men were left to help one another to their feet and put away their weapons. The mass of filthy Gypsies made one dash at us and in a trice had surrounded us. I compared them to Doré's illustrations of the greedy souls in Hell, all with their hands outstretched, gesticulating, wild-eyed multitudes of stricken humanity. The peasant stood his ground like a man, but he whispered in my ear: "For God's sake, don't let us stay here: they are *Netotsi* and will do us harm, for they're as treacherous as foxes." I was fascinated by those waifs and strays and I wanted to see their camp, so I ended by persuading the peasant, much against his will, to stay by me until I should gratify my curiosity. It was very hard to find breathing-space in the midst of this ill-smelling band, but I hit upon a clever expedient. I seized my fiddle and waving it in the air I shouted: "Bashavav." Then I started to play one Roumanian dance after another, hoping to imitate the example of the Pied Piper. My scheme worked admirably, for the Gypsies retired to a little distance and gazed at me in open-eyed wonder. Then they started clapping their hands in rhythm and stamping their feet. Little by little the men and women departed and my audience dwindled to a bevy of bright-eyed naked children who rolled about the ground at my feet. Then we proceeded to the camp, which was only a few steps away behind a large rock. It was the usual gathering of ragged tents, but far more squalid than the camp of the Gypsies near Arpas. Near the tents were the ramshackle carts piled with every sort of miscellaneous object; poles, skins, carpets, pots, pans, pillows, and around them were some wretched donkeys and horses. Some of the women

crouched over fires and smoked curious stumps of pipes filled with weeds which gave off a noxious odour. In my pockets I had some cigarettes which I threw to one of the men. With a shout of glee he rushed off to show what I had given him to a ragged woman dressed in a faded red dress but with big earrings. Like the majority of the women with children, she had naked breasts and she carried her baby in a bundle strapped on to her back, and as she walked the infant shrieked. She came up to me and put out her hand, whining for money. Seeing that this manoeuvre was unsuccessful, she retired a few steps and started to dance round and round, singing in a monotonous voice while some of her companions clapped hands and the baby on her back continued wailing. My peasant friend was becoming very impatient at my prolonged stay in the Gypsy camp and he would come up every minute and say: "Why can't we go to Hell out of this?" Then a black-bearded Gypsy drew him away to show him some lucky talismans. Meanwhile a small, wizened-faced Gypsy took my arm and whispered the word "reci" in my ear. I remembered the fiery *reci*, or brandy, which the chief had given me when I was the guest of the Gypsy tribe near Arpas, but I wanted to taste it again. So I followed him into one of the tents.

In the tent there was no one but ourselves and for the first time I began to feel uneasy, for my companion did not inspire me with any confidence. His hair was long and matted and fell in greasy folds over his rough, unshaven cheeks. Inside the tent there was a suffocating stench of canine and porcine excrement, for he kept the pigs tethered at the entrance and there were dogs sprawling at the back of the tent.

As soon as he had drawn me inside the tent he put his fingers to his lips as though he had some secret to tell me. Then he murmured the words "chai shukar," and I understood that he wanted to bring in a girl for me. I shook my head, but he laughed and ran out of the tent. In a few minutes he returned with a young girl who did not look more than thirteen years of age. She was a shy and wild

little thing and the man had to drag her by force into the tent. She had nothing on but a dirty blue smock and she was barefoot. Around her neck, however, she wore a chain of coloured beads. Her body was as lithe as a panther's, her skin hazel-coloured and her hair as jet-coloured as her eyes. The Gypsy stood there watching the effect the girl's beauty would have upon me. She was his daughter, I gathered, but he would give her to me for a certain sum of lei. I shook my head, but he did not seem to understand why I would not take her, and he kept repeating the word "shukar" again and again, grinning malevolently. As for the girl, she stood there passively like an animal to be offered up for sacrifice. Alas! O Borrow: where are your theories about the chastity of Gypsy women and the fierceness of male jealousy? Here was this wretched vagabond offering me his own daughter for a few lei as though she was a piece of merchandise. Seeing that I was adamant he signed to the girl to withdraw, and he went to a corner and pulled out a bottle of brandy, saying "picho ref." As I thought it best to humour him, I took the drink and expressed my gratitude. It was vile stuff, and I might as well have swallowed liquid fire. When I had sipped it I handed him back the bottle and he took a deep swig at it. Soon his whole personality became more brutal and sinister: his eyes gleamed malevolently and he became more pressing for money. He put out his hand and touched my clothes and patted my arms, adopting a mock suppliant attitude which made me shrink away from him. As I tried to retreat towards the entrance of the tent he kept pressing on and suddenly he laid hands on me. Before I could avoid him he had caught me by the neck and his horny fingers tightened on my throat. I tried to struggle against him, but his arms were around me and I could not shout. We rolled about the tent and I saw that the only chance for me would be to kick him on the shins so hard that he would loosen his grip. At last I managed to get sufficient leverage on my leg and I kicked him with the full weight of my boot. With a muffled curse he let go the tight grip on my neck and I recovered enough

breath to shout out for help to my peasant companion, who could not be very far away, for he had wanted to keep an eye on me.

The Gypsy, however, was becoming more frantic each second in his struggles. At one moment I saw him pull out something which glistened : it was a knife. I felt myself becoming paralysed with fear and I shut my eyes, expecting the burning sensation of the gash and the rush of blood . . . but then I heard a shout behind me : it was my peasant friend. Without wasting words he rushed at the Gypsy and struck him on the head with the big stick he was carrying. With a groan the Gypsy sank to the ground and lay there stunned.

"Quick, quick, let us get away at once," said the peasant ; " they will catch us if we don't run for our lives, and God knows what they'll do to us."

I was feeling faint and worn out and utterly unfitted for outdistancing Gypsies. There was nothing for it but to struggle after my peasant friend, who ran as if a herd of ghosts were pursuing him.

Luckily it was not very difficult to get away from the camp, for the Gypsy's tent was concealed from the rest by a clump of bushes. We heard a few shouts, but nobody followed us out into the road. At last we halted by a stream to regain our breath. For a long time I lay on the ground exhausted : I felt faint and my neck hurt as though the Gypsy had branded his fingers with red-hot irons on my throat.

According to the peasant, we were lucky to escape so easily, for those Gypsies were of the nomadic type known as the *Netotsi*, who are the most fierce of all when roused. The police, he told me, would never go near them in the wild places, for they are so treacherous that it is impossible to get the better of them. He said that there were rumours recently of their having attacked a traveller and killed him. It was also said that they ate his corpse. Hence it is that Roumanian peasants will have nothing to do with those Gypsies unless in the light of the day when there are plenty of people about. " But you are a stranger in our country,

sir," said he, "and I felt that it was my duty to accompany you to see that no harm came your way." That remark was characteristic of the Roumanian peasant, who will go out of his way to help a stranger, even when it may bring him into danger, as it did on this occasion.

At last we came to the parting of the ways and the peasant had to leave me to continue my way. We said farewell and I kissed him on both cheeks, for he had saved my life, and I asked him his name and the name of his village, for I made a vow I would send him a reward when I returned home. Meanwhile I offered him as a memento a ring I was wearing, but he would not accept the gift. Then he left me, and I saw his tall figure disappear in the distance through the fields, making a white speck on the horizon.

I was heartily sorry to say farewell to this new friend, for he had cheered me on my journey and I was frightened at the idea of having to wander on by myself. I was unnerved and every few steps I travelled seemed to bring me nearer to some fresh Gypsy camp where there would be cut-throats. I shivered when passing between clumps of bushes and on one occasion I thought I was bewitched.

Night had fallen and the landscape was illuminated by a wan moon that gave every tree and shrub a ghostly appearance. In the shadows there seemed to lurk hidden beings, and I had the overpowering sensation of being followed.

Then suddenly I heard a strange clang that made my blood run cold. What could it be? It sounded like the knell of the dead. It seemed to be borne upon the breeze which was blowing through the trees.

At last I discovered the cause.

Near me, hidden by some trees, was an old wooden cross with a shingle roof over it. Attached to it was a rusty metal figure of Our Lord. As the breeze blew the metal figure, which was hanging loosely by two nails, clanked against the cross and awoke the ghostly terrors of the night. Earlier in the day such a cross would have been a place of calm retreat away from the heat of the



sun : to-night it made me dream of all that was macabre and dismal. Who knows why it was set up in this lonely spot? Perhaps it commemorates some dastardly murder that was committed on a lonely traveller by a blood-fiend Gypsy who thought that being a *busnó*, he carried gold in his wallet. Those humble wayside crosses dotted about the Roumanian countryside are forlorn reminders of Jesus and they speak the sweet humility of a religion that belongs to the peasant. The eyes of the Christ are large and stare into space with that ecstatic expression of the Byzantine mosaic figures.

There must be a subtle influence in those wayside crosses, for after I left that one and continued my way, I felt no longer the perils of loneliness. I walked resolutely towards Braşov.

*Adventures in Third Class*

IF I were to choose my mode of travelling through Roumania in summer I should never forsake the open road, for no country is kinder to the wanderer who has good legs. Other countries in Europe have become impossible for the pedestrian owing to the multitude of motors, but Roumania still has lonely roads and paths through dark forests that may tempt the man who wishes to shun modern civilization.

When I needed to advance more quickly on my journey I travelled third class in the Roumanian trains. The first- and second-class carriages are comfortable but very dull, for one might as well be a passenger on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. In third class you may meet the true Roumanian, the hardy peasant man and woman with their baskets laden for the market, or else the restless Gypsy hawking his wares or playing his fiddle to earn a lei or two.

When you go to a Roumanian station and manage after a vigorous struggle to capture your ticket from Braşov to Bucharest, you may think that you can walk straight on to the platform and take up a strategic position for the train. No, that is not so ; in Roumania they have adopted the American system of confining you to the *sala de aşteptare* or waiting-room until a few minutes before the arrival of the train. Roumanians know this by experience and prepare themselves to spring like panthers when the door is opened, so that they may capture the best places.

The poor traveller who carries his fiddle-case, his rucksack and extra belongings accumulated *en route*, trots along out of breath, hoping that by the mercy of Providence a place has been left for him.

When he gets to the carriage he finds every available

space filled with men, women, children, baskets, bags, geese, turkeys, and even goats. Such was my experience on so many occasions that I looked forward to my third-class carriage with feelings of complete resignation.

The portico of Braşov Station on my arrival seemed to have written on it in red illuminated letters the words :

*"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate."*

I was prepared for the usual inferno of night travelling with its hundred ills. I only asked myself mentally the question : in which circle shall I be set to-night ? What extra worry and torture will be reserved for me ?

I arrived at the station at 11.30 p.m. to take the midnight train for Bucharest, but was told that there would be delay, for the train had been losing time all the way along the line.

I went into the third-class waiting-room and tried to find a seat, but not one was to be had. An immense crowd was scattered everywhere : men, women and children were lying on the floor in motley confusion. Some were snoring with wide-open mouths, others were huddled into deformed shapes, and more than one adopted the posture of letting his head sink down between his knees. In one corner a buxom young woman was breast-feeding an infant as if all the confusion around her was of no consequence. She seemed to soar over the prone bodies of grovelling humanity as a symbol of victorious maternity, the ray of hope for the future. Beside the woman four children played silently with pieces of string and umbrellas.

Why do railway waiting-rooms show human beings at their worst ? There are men lying asleep whose faces frighten me by their animal ferocity. I am sure in real life they are kind and apologetic, but here lying doubled up on the ground in complete self-abandonment they looked like corpses extracted from shell-fire. In their faces there was agony and the god of sleep had not given them any softness in their rest.

Suddenly the whole hall sprang into movement as though someone had pulled hidden wires for those puppets.

The door was opened and the crowd rushed on to the platform. To call them platforms is a euphemism, for they are merely narrow spaces between the railway tracks.

I was told by a porter that the train was to arrive on the third track. But just before it arrived another steamed into the station on the second track. Our band tried to dash on to the third track behind the second train, only to find itself thrown back by the army of passengers that swarmed from the carriages.

There was for some minutes a raging maelstrom: no words could describe it. It was a visit to the circles of the damned in Hell, with Charon striking at us with his pole. We were all wedged into a tiny space about four feet broad between the two trains. I had still in my composition enough of the Briton to remember the words: "England expects every man to do his duty." I struggled manfully on, carrying my violin-case, camera, rucksack and a cardboard box. The crowd gradually formed itself into two factions representing the two trains and we fought and pushed and rushed—all very good-humouredly, for good humour is the unfailing attitude of the Roumanian. I am afraid my thoughts were not of such a kindly hue: I cursed in the broadest, obscenest and most blasphemous English.

In the middle of the crowd was an old woman who fought like a demon: she ought to have been present at the Revolution and knitted stockings at a barricade. She had with her two enormous hampers, one full of hens and the other full of ducks. The clucking and quacking of those birds had something fateful about it and made me think of the Geese of the Capitol. At one moment a shove from the belly of a fat moustachioed man knocked open the lid of the basket and one of the hens flew out: it would have winged its flight to serener regions had I not put out my hand and caught the refractory bird by a claw and held on to it like grim death. The flapping of the accursed hen's wings in my face and its wild clucking would have made a stronger man quail and I was at that time in the midst of a surging crowd.

At length the bird was restored to its hamper and we were nearer the door to our carriage, but even then our troubles were only half over. Every time we rushed the steps of the carriage the others in front of us thrust us back, and back we fell. As I have mentioned, I had amongst my belongings a cardboard box tied up with string in which I had put all that would not fit into my bag—music, papers, books and souvenirs. Suddenly at this moment it became wearied of the struggle and burst open, scattering Bach, Brahms and Kreisler among the crowd. Nobody can imagine what fatigue it cost me to rescue that music and plough my way back again to the carriage.

When I got into the corridor another maelstrom was raging—women shouting, men swearing, ducks quacking, hens clucking, and to add to the horror the light in the carriage was not lit. Why do peasant women wear ten petticoats in train-fights? I understand now that I have had my baptism of fire: the skirts and petticoats are the substitute in train-fights for the coat of mail of more unregenerate days. Eventually I obtained a seat—an outer seat—the most uncomfortable one in the carriage, for it had no rest for the head. An additional discomfort was caused by the door which opened every minute and let in the icy night air. However, at last we were settled and it was time to thank God for small mercies.

The scene in the carriage was one that would have excited Velásquez to paint another scene like "Los Borrachos." I was beside two well-fed youths who were going to Ploëști: on the other side were two or three soldiers, some peasants and a few country-town worthies, seemingly grocers. Opposite me an old man with gaping mouth breathed garlic upon me of such potency that I involuntarily crossed myself, lest he thought me bewitched, for garlic, according to Gypsy-lore, is a magic herb and counteracts the evil eye. I certainly felt as if his mephitic fumes had brought up all the evil thoughts in the world into my mind. I wonder how garlic can smell so strong? It permeates the atmosphere as though it were acetylene gas. During a long train journey primitive people do not

know what to do to pass the time : they do not read or pray and so they tend to develop various mannerisms which are disturbing to the sensitive traveller. Some of my companions in the carriage coughed and grunted : a fat man belched so continuously that he must have imagined he was in a Mohammedan household after dinner and had to give thanks in the traditional way for the repast. A youngish soldier spat ceaselessly in queer rhythmic sequence. He would spit softly, then clear his throat, then spit louder : then start pianissimo again, leading up to the big clear-throat. As for the women, they were less assertive, poor things, being concerned with their clucking hens in the baskets. At Sinaia there was another period of pandemonium, for many of the women had to descend to go to the Fair. All their voluminous parcels and baskets had to be dug out from beneath the other luggage. The air in the carriage became stuffy and sleep was impossible.

I thought of Sinaia bosomed in its mountains with the country palace of Roumania's King. Up there were cool woods and rippling streams : I saw the vision of a beautiful queen walking in the gardens with a boy king.

Lucky the man who can soar away on the wings of such visions, for then gentle sleep descends and gives the wanderer peace.

*Bucharest*

## I. THE LIGHTS

**B**UCHAREST always had for me something of ancient Bagdad's appeal and I imagined it as a miniature city of the *Arabian Nights*. Travellers who had visited it came back with tales of Oriental luxury and brilliance that eclipsed Paris, the city of light. How could it help being a dazzling city when it combined the rich colours of the Turk with the classical elegance of the Greek? In the folk-lore of the Roumanian villages the fairy city is always Bucharest, and in my wanderings among the peasantry and Gypsies they would draw for me, fantastic pictures of unbridled luxury and exotic vices that recalled Imperial Rome.

When I arrived at Bucharest Station at half-past six in the morning, after the hectic journey described in the last chapter, I was unable to see any beauty : I had forgotten Bagdad and I only saw dirt and squalor everywhere. Friends had told me of the rascality of certain Bucharest jarveys and porters who seize on the unwary traveller and carry him off a helpless victim, so I determined to be firm and discover my lodgings unaided. At Cluj I had cashed a cheque for ten pounds, and this money had to last me until I got to Italy once more, so the watchword had to be rigid economy.

I trudged along the long street called the *calca Griviței* and made many attempts to discover a humble hotel. The morning was hot and my baggage and fiddle weighed me down. Eventually I secured a small room in a little inn near the end of the *calca Griviței* at the price of eighty lei, or about two shillings.

My first duty was to slough off, with my ragged clothes, my vagabond personality, and dress up as a respectable

member of society. It was a mistake to do this, because though I had the clothes I had not the money with which to lead the life of a bourgeois in the city.

The entry to Bucharest does not call up visions of the city of light in the mind of the newly-arrived traveller, for he has to walk down a long stretch of the very ragged calea Griviței with its Gypsy hawkers. But then he consoles himself by reflecting that the railway entrance to Venice is unworthy of the Queen of the Adriatic.

At the end of the calea Griviței we turn into the calea Victoriei, which is the main artery of the capital. So important is it that it has given rise to the proverb: "Bucharest is the town of one street, one Church and one idea." It is a curious straggling street and for some reason brought back to my mind the Calle de Sierpes of Seville. Like the Sevillian street, it attracts all the picturesque loungers of the city, but the crowd is cosmopolitan instead of being regional. In fact the calea Victoriei irresistibly suggests a Paris boulevard in miniature. There is the same clear atmosphere and the same bright buildings. Even the motor horns make the same squeaking sound and the cars bustle noisily instead of gliding through the streets. The people on the footpaths are more voluble than the Parisian *flâneurs* and the ladies are so smart that I imagined I was gazing at the gayer Paris we used to know before the War.

One of the first sights that interested me was a group of Gypsy flower-sellers hawking their fresh blooms everywhere. Generally speaking, they are interesting types of Gypsy beauty with olive complexion and raven-black hair. They increase their picturesqueness by wearing round their heads handkerchiefs of bright colour. As for their costume, it is very scanty and more than one girl showed her budding breasts above her very low-necked chemise. They attracted me, for they were like quicksilver in their vivacity. I stopped to speak to a few in Romany, but found that most of them did not understand more than a few words. They kept on chattering to me gaily in Roumanian until I bought some flowers to get rid of them. Though their



faces are so vivacious at some moments, they can become as passively inert as Orientals. True to their Gypsy nature, they seem to be able in a second to pull down a mental shutter which leaves their faces a blank. In restaurants and cafés these Gypsy girls and street vendors are a great nuisance, for every moment they want the harried guest to buy their wares and the waiters allow them to persecute with impunity. I have seen men in white robes and wearing the red fez of the Turk come in to sell penknives, photographs of naked women, brooches, Turkish carpets and embroideries.

It is curious how Bucharest intoxicates the man who has just come up from the countryside.

The calea Victoriei became for me a gradual initiation into the refinements of the city. At first I was a country lout with shiny face soaped for the occasion : my clothes were not well enough tailored for the street, and I imagined self-consciously the tight-waisted dandies were shooting sarcastic glances at me. The world was out of tune and I nearly turned back to the humble chop-houses of the calea Griviței.

But gradually as I walked along I began to step out with more determination and to ape the manner of the city man. My senses were unfrayed and elastic after my stay in the country and the sounds, the sights and the scents of the street began to work upon me like some subtle opiate.

The sound of traffic when it is not deafening produces on me the same effect as good jazz and exhilarates my nerves, for I imagine I can discover through the cacophony a principle, a fixed rhythm to which I may harness my thoughts. Sometimes the rhythm rocks me in waltz-time like Ravel's modernist valse on the orchestra ; at other moments I am driven on in a remorseless four-eight rhythm as if I were a Gypsy.

The colours of Bucharest too exercise a siren's charm upon the foreigner. The houses glistened white and gold under the sun and later in the afternoon became touched with pink. The sky was so blue that it resounded like a

clarion on my brain and became a booming pedal-note over which all the other colours moved in varying tones. Sometimes the colour scheme would dart a note of brown into prominence—the olive face of a Gypsy—at other times a light red dress would stimulate my fancy.

Colours, especially red, stir up sexual emotion, and I found myself chasing a beautiful but elusive face through the crowds. A pretty girl in a red dress is as dangerous as a *vila*, for she might lead you after her over hill, over dale, as if you were Camaralzaman chasing the beautiful bird. I was of a fickle disposition and I soon became wearied of unyielding red because a face encased in a blue toque seemed daintier, and then a third fair blue-eyed houri floated just by me in vapourous pink, drawing me unconsciously after her as though she held the fruit of Lotus in her arms.

In my long progress along the *calca Victoriei*, and during my initiation into the haunts of Bucharest luxury, I hardly saw a woman who had not a good figure: even the lithe Gypsy flower-sellers would have been the envy of many of our North-European women. Of course, the smart figure and fashionable appearance is only obtained by a quasi-religious dedication on the part of the Bucharest lady, and in no city have I seen so much powder and paint. Some people say that such aids to beauty are necessary because the Roumanian woman's complexion is her weakest point, but I do not agree with them; the golden pallor of many of these women looks more beautiful when it is left *au naturel*. When it is whitened and rouged the face becomes the thin mask or *loupe*, common to Berlin, London, Paris, or New York, and we are left only the consolation of those wide, dark eyes, which are unrivalled save by those of Carmen.

The higher I advanced up the street, the more imposing the buildings became, until I reached the *Chaussée*, where the smart people of Bucharest meet. I passed the Royal Palace, the fine University building, and then the National Theatre with its majestic entrance. On all sides I saw luxurious hotels and restaurants. Now that the sun was

sinking the lights began to shine in the windows and a greater crowd began to fill the street. It is said that at this hour of the evening you may meet in this street every diplomat, every *cocotte* and every Gypsy. Every nationality seemed to be represented in this crowded pageant, and I heard French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Russian as well as Roumanian in the space of two hundred yards. But French is spoken by far the greatest number of the *habitués* of the street: German I found more popular among the shopkeepers and small tradespeople. If I were a Roumanian I should feel indignant against all this foreign speech. Writers have told me in Bucharest that newspapers and even novels are no longer written in pure Roumanian, but show an immense number of gallicisms which have weakened the language. I noticed the same tendency in women's clothes: they all seemed to have come from shops in Paris, ranging from Poirer down to *Le Bon Marché*. One of my first duties in Bucharest was to visit the Roumanian National Theatre, for I had been given a letter of introduction from Professor Grimm to the director, Rebreanu, who exercises a government-imposed dictatorship over the playhouses and cinemas of the city.

The Bucharest theatre belongs to a period when everything connected with the stage was huge, magnificent and highly ornamented. There is none of the economy of space that we find in the art theatres of to-day. I floundered about in countless passages, and eventually was ushered into an ante-room to wait my turn to see the great man. I always feel an affection for the ante-rooms of theatrical directors, for they are sure to be full of strange types of the drama. This one at Bucharest was one of the best examples I had met in Europe: it was full of actors and actresses—old, young, fat, thin, made-up, sallow-faced, dyspeptic, florid and smiling. In one corner I saw a fat, oldish lady with a young girl of seventeen. The old lady, who was puffing violently with excitement, had, I inferred, brought her daughter to be tried for the stage. She was sure her daughter would make a success if only she got "a leg up." But the girl looked glum and shy: I am sure

when Monsieur Rebreanu asks her to recite something she will swing one leg round the other, blush and miss the thread after the first line. Next to her were two very precious and affected girls, peroxided, painted and powdered, smoking cigarettes and sitting in such a way that we could see a full display of *crêpe de Chine*, lace-edged. By their insolence and their sardonic comments at the expense of the fat lady, I concluded they had minor parts in shows, and were waiting to get a rise in weekly wages. At the other side of the room were the more important personages. There was one good-looking girl who reminded me of Athena Dimitrescu: she sat in a corner, dressed in gorgeous fur wraps, though it was sunny September, and the young men around her kept continually kissing her hand. The wraps, I am convinced, were worn so as to shut out contagion from lower mortals at the other side of the room. The young actors were good-looking in the Roumanian masculine way, though to my northern taste too effeminate. They were fat and clean-shaven, with black hair and side whiskers, and two of them were dressed in violent black and white checks.

At last the usher called me into the presence and Rebreanu advanced to greet me.

Rebreanu was a man of about fifty-five years of age, massively built and of commanding presence: he reminded me more of a Scandinavian than a Roumanian. In mentality he was more international than any theatrical director I had met, and his influence at Bucharest has been all-powerful in presenting to the capital the best works of the modern dramatists. He is specially interested in the idea of the studio theatre, and he has inaugurated one in Bucharest as a kind of workshop for playwrights. Hearing that I was one of the directors of the Irish National Theatre, he gave me a permanent ticket for the director's box at the play. He was well acquainted with the Irish dramatists and had read Synge and O'Casey, even though, as he confessed to me, his English was not a match for those plays. His favourite author was Lord Dunsany, because he considered him more European than the others. The peculiar

quality of Dunsany's fantasy seemed to him quite unique in the European theatre to-day, and he was sure that the Roumanian public would welcome enthusiastically a play such as *The Gods of the Mountain*, and it would be an inspiration to the younger playwrights in the country to produce works in that style. "In our literature," said he, "there is an abundance of fantasy which springs from the folk-lore of the people. All over Roumania we have an immense wealth of legends of fairies and spirits, which our writers have been slow to weave into their works because they have been so dominated by the modern French witty, social comedy. In many of the plays here the characters are not Roumanian, but foreigners. The only hope for the future development of our theatre lies in the closer study of the legends and poems of the folk." I then told him of my visit to the Library of Folk Music in the city, directed by the learned musician Breasu, and how I had been able to study gramophone records of the singing and playing of the musicians in every village throughout the whole country. "Something analogous should be done for drama," said he; "there should be a library accessible to the young dramatist, where he may be able to discover new plots based on the life of the peasants for his plays."

Of all the modern dramatists in Europe to-day, Rebreanu has the greatest reverence for George Bernard Shaw, and of all his plays he prefers *Man and Superman* because it is the most universal. Just at this time he had staged a performance of the play, including the scene in the infernal regions. In his opinion the play should not be played on the old-fashioned, realistic stage, but should be set in modernist, Cubist surroundings, and the acting should be stylized in the Russian manner. And it was this scene in the nether regions which aroused the greatest enthusiasm in the public. The finer point of many of the paradoxes was lost on the public, which expected Shavian wit to be entirely Gallic with no dose of sermonizing.

As a contrast to Shaw's play the production of *Measure for Measure*, by Shakespeare, was much more conventional from the continental point of view. For a moment I

thought I had been transported to the "Théâtre Français," for the interpretation was of the Parisian kind. The actors declaimed the lines as though they were heroes and heroines of Corneille, and there was a rigidity in every action. The lilting cadences of the Roumanian language in the speeches of Isabella made one think of a honeyed Shakespeare—languid, sensitive, writing with a book of rules beside him and accustomed to the society of the salons of a capital city. Before I left the city I went to a performance of a play called *Rodia de Aur* by a Roumanian dramatist.

This was more interesting for a stranger because the play was based on Roumanian folk-lore and introduced peasants, Gypsies, bears and all the apparatus of the fairy story. From the way in which the public welcomed the play it was evident that such a fantastic work, composed of legends, folk-tunes and customs, is the species of dramatic performance which makes the greatest appeal to-day to the Roumanians of Bucharest, who are becoming more strongly nationalistic and rejecting the frivolous importations from other countries.

In music the same process of nationalism may be seen in George Enescu, whom I heard give a violin recital during my stay in Bucharest. Enescu has spent a great part of his life abroad in such cities as Paris and Vienna, and has won European fame, not only as a violin virtuoso, but as a composer and conductor. By his ceaseless efforts to perpetuate the Roumanian idiom in music he has built up a school of composers in Roumania which tries to do for the country what Bartók and Kodály are doing for Hungary and Falla for Spain. Enescu's violin and piano sonatas and his two Roumanian rhapsodies are Western music, but they are based upon the Roumanian idiom, with its Celtic melancholy, its strange intervals, its trills and embellishments, and they are national in spirit. From Enescu have sprung such composers as Otescu, Alessandrescu, Tora and Stan Golestan, all of them younger men whose works deserve to be known in other lands. In his violin-playing Enescu is a descendant of the great old classical school of Hellmesberger at Vienna, and he excels

in the works of Bach and Beethoven. But in addition he has a delightful French sprightliness in his execution, admirably adapted to such works as the "Symphonie espagnole" of Lalo, which he plays better than any violinist, with the exception of Thibaud. In addition there is an indefinable quality about his playing which I should call Roumanian and which gives an element of mystery and poetry to his interpretations. It is as though at the back of Enescu, the man and artist educated in Europe, there was Enescu the Roumanian Gypsy, wandering from village to village playing *doinas* and *horas* for the peasants. After hearing his refined, majestic art I left the concert hall and went to hear the celebrated Gypsy player, Dinicu, in a restaurant, and there I revelled in the minstrel player, the mouthpiece for the wild Romany music of Roumania, that exists in the Gypsy camps by the fires and floats on all the breezes of the countryside.

The life in Bucharest, the city of light, is one round of gaiety and *flanerie*. Nobody in the *calea Victoriei* ever hurries, for gaiety is more languid and less hectic than in Paris or New York. The city of light reminds one of the Paris of 1880 or 1890, and we see hosts of open carriages filled with gaily-dressed ladies with their cavaliers driving out to the country. The coachmen in Bucharest are mysterious, sallow-complexioned, fat men who are said to belong to a Russian sect. They are not garrulous or witty like the Cockney chauffeur or his Parisian counterpart, and I feel that they would be the ideal jehus for anyone who was engaged in clandestine love-making. Their lips would be sealed as tight as those of the guardian of a seraglio. The stranger to-day would welcome a little more secrecy in the ways of, and methods of, those devotees of Venus who parade the *calea Victoriei* in pairs and press their attentions so urgently. It is unwise for the stranger to sit down in a restaurant without a female companion, for that would be most uncavalier in a city where there are so many lonely damsels. I shall describe one small experience which befell me, and I am sure it is typical of countless others.

One evening I halted in my lounging through the colourful calea Victoriei and turned into a big open-air café called the Piccadilly. It was up on a terrace where a military band was playing, and there were so many people that I could hardly find a seat at one of the small tables in the outer ring. At last I found a place from where I could watch the many varied types of humanity as I drank my coffee and *dulceața*.

I had been sitting, sipping my cordial for a few minutes when two girls who were at a table in my line of vision bowed very charmingly to me. I did not recognize their faces, but I thought it best to be gallant, so I bowed too. A few minutes later as they got up to go one of them turned towards me, then they walked away. A minute later the girl who had looked at me came up to my table and, smiling engagingly, sat down.

She evidently saw by my face that I was a foreigner, for she addressed me in perfect French :

"I am sure I know you, Monsieur ; did I not meet you here the other night—*Voyons*, remember ?"

I saw that to break off suddenly would have made a scene, so I let her win the first round. "You won't win the second," said I to myself as I asked her whether she would have a black coffee. For, to tell the truth, I had only allowed myself to wander up the calea Victoriei this evening on condition that there must be no treating of girls, however attractive they might be and however useful as mediums for psychological experiments. She parried my thrust about the black coffee rather neatly, for she called over the waiter and said aloud : "Two ices !" The menial, being born and bred in Bucharest, bowed and withdrew to execute the order. To me the cost was enormous, and I could not help saying to my weaker self : "There goes eighty lei, and I so wanted to buy some books of Creangă and Caragiale."

Meanwhile the girl chattered gaily with that light persiflage which drives all a man's rancour into hidden corners to smoulder unobserved. I rather admired her, for she was smartly dressed in grey. She was not a Rou-



manian—*oh non !* She was proud to be a Greek, and her name was Lucrezia Augustopoulos. (When I was telling the story a few days later to a cynical Frenchman, he shrugged his shoulders and said the word *poule* had an international ring about it.) She had spent five years in Russia, at Moscow and Odessa—"the happiest years of my life, for the Russian he is a *seigneur*—much better than the Roumanian."

After some more minutes of futile conversation I paid the bill and thought that at last she or I would be able to take the quietus. Instead, she asked for a fourth cigarette, and leaning her elbows on the table began to talk more intimately.

At that moment I began to feel uneasy, for she was an attractive girl and I was very lonely in Bucharest. It would be rather fun to give her dinner and then get rid of her in time to go and see one of my acquaintances at nine-thirty. My practical personality had not yet been vanquished and made a valiant attempt to disturb the equanimity of his rival by flashing into my brain again the vision of my impecuniousness ; hence, "this way and that divided my swift mind."

She pleaded very eloquently that I should take her out and give her a little dinner ; for she had worked all day in an office and now at eight o'clock she deserved a treat—"Quant à plus tard on verrait !"

I gave in quite suddenly and told her to choose the restaurant, but it must be very cheap as I had very little money.

She took me to a Hungarian restaurant near the post office, which seemed to me palatial and Ritz-like, but was a cheap place according to her ideas. At table we both chose mutton with paprika and bottles of beer, and I was consoling myself with the Panglossian thought that all was for the best, when suddenly I saw my partner's girl companion enter. She came over towards our table. Then Lucrezia Augustopoulos said to me in an appealing voice : "Vous savez, mon cher, elle est ma petite amie : nous allons partout ensemble—come, be sporting, let her just sit at our table."

I tried to say "two is company, three is none," but I got lost in the translation. Meanwhile the waiter, in subtle Roumanian fashion came up with the menu and said: "What will monsieur order for mademoiselle?" The girl (who was Hungarian as she afterwards told me) ordered very rapidly: "A good *gulyás*, potatoes, peas and jelly to follow." "And what wine, sir?" proceeded the imperturbable waiter. "Oh, a half-bottle of Tokay." All this was said and dispatched with such swiftness that my breath was taken away and I could only marvel at her skill.

When the two girls were well set at their game of knife and fork they began to tell me of the attractions of night life in Bucharest, and they said they would show me many wonderful sights that I could never see in Paris, Berlin or Vienna. At first I tried an ironic tone with them, but I found myself becoming more and more exasperated as I replied to their coquetries and pornographic quips.

They had now finished their solid meal and were picking their teeth.

Whether Lucrezia Augustopoulos now realized that the fruit was squeezed dry and that there was no chance of *Mulatni*, I know not, but her manner changed suddenly. It was as if a grey blind had been pulled down over her mobile face. At first she was as sparkling as one of Lucian's *Hetærae*: she bantered me, she played up to me, she made eyes at me, she used every trick to capture me. Then when I had paid the bill (an enormous one that caused me to leave my wretched hotel in the *calea Griviței* next day and move to the Gypsy quarter) she relaxed her features. Her mouth became a frown, with the corners turned down, and her face looked so worn that I could count the wrinkles. It was as if a calm lake had suddenly been ruffled by a breeze.

There was no need for her to play a part after the play was over.

Both girls recognized an insolent-faced gentleman who was sitting alone at the next table and waved their hand to him. The next step was to start an amusing conversation with him in which I did not count at all.

My first thought was that it would give me infinite pleasure to follow the irate continental plan and start a row.

But my passion froze into a posture. I was too British to avenge my "point of honour" as though I were a Spanish hidalgo.

I rose with dignity, and bowing to the party I left the restaurant.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### *Bucharest*

#### II. THE SHADOWS. LIFE AMONG THE VAGABONDS

THE Bucharest I described in the last chapter belonged to the prosperous and fashionable world of the *flaneur* who passes from one round of gaiety to another. I was unable to continue my life in that world because my small supply of money was running out and I had to keep a reserve fund for my journey home. I tried to exercise my musical talents in a crowded part of the *calea Victoriei*, but I was politely told to move on by a policeman. He did not consider me a Roumanian itinerant musician in spite of the *horas* I was playing, for he addressed me in German.

I therefore left what we might call the "West End" of the city and departed to the slum and vagabond side where room and food would not cost more than a few lei. No city I have ever visited keeps the two sides more apart than Bucharest. When walking up the *calea Victoriei* or the Boulevard you are not conscious of aught else save the brilliant lights of life, but when you descend near the River *Dambovița* there are shadows that blot out the sunshine and in those shadows lurk many strange types of humanity. This Bucharest of the shadows is even more picturesque and colourful than the city of lights, but like modern art it keeps continually thrusting the grotesque forward as a parody of the beautiful.

My first view of the ragged quarter was at sunset ; one of those deep crimson Roumanian sunsets that transform squalor into fairyland. In that red world there was every species of noise, sight and smell. I have always noticed that the smells monopolize our attention at first and it is only when our nose has accustomed itself to their charivari

that sound and sight enter the lists. At first the smell of stale fish clouded my senses, but gradually various undertones emerged, of ground coffee, spices, garlic, the petrol of taxis, roast corn cobs and a pervading scent of human sweat.

The heat was still terrific though the sun was sinking to rest, and I was glad to halt every step to examine the booths of the itinerant sellers. After the smells had lost their pungency I found that I was wellnigh deafened by the din that raged round me. In our drab cities of the north we have no conception of the street sounds of southern or eastern Europe. On one side you hear the grinding of tram-cars and the hooting of the taxis, on the other there is a hoarse babble of human voices : coachmen shouting to their lean horses as they crack their whips, dogs barking, children squealing, men laughing, women calling out their wares in a monotonous, sing-song voice ; while through the din from time to time I could hear a gramophone in an upper storey playing a frenzied disk of Roumanian polkas.

It would be necessary to possess the powers of Goya or at least Hogarth to do justice to the immense variety of types that I met on the bank of the river. The great centre of the orgy of sight and sound was the bridge spanning the river.

It was impossible to halt here without being accosted by the countless loungers whose whole life was spent in this moving scene. I expected any moment to see the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid cross before me, dressed as a merchant, followed by the Grand Vizier Giafar and the eunuch Mesrour. There were many peasants about dressed in what I recognized as the Transylvanian costume. They looked hungry and dejected, poor fellows. I suppose they had tramped all the way from their far-off regions in order to seek redress in the capital, fondly imagining that the King would never refuse them justice.

As far as I could see, every country of the Balkans was represented here. There were Bulgarians, Yugo-Slavs, Greeks, Russians, Turks and Armenians. The little Turkish itinerant sellers fascinated me most of all by their

meticulous precision in business. One of them wearing a little red fez on his big head called me over to where he was squatting and addressed me in voluble German. He had rugs and embroideries for sale. As soon as I started to examine his wares the neighbouring sellers of gaudy trinkets came up and tried to lure me away to their stores : then a violent dispute arose between them and the Turk, a dispute rendered dramatic by a wealth of gesture in which the Turk won.

Among those street vendors naturally the Gypsies predominate. They are everywhere : the women walk up and down carrying the baby while the husband robs or begs. Then when he has scraped some money together he goes off and drinks it with her.

Many a time some terrible deformity passed before my eyes : blind people tapping the walls with their sticks as they guided their tottering footsteps, women with wooden legs clattering along the pavement. In one place a tiny dwarf crawled up to me to beg for alms : she was only a stump of a woman, for there was nothing below her waist. She wore on her hands a pair of wooden sabots on which she paddled herself along the street. In addition to being deformed she was dumb, for when I spoke to her she only made a gurgling sound as answer.

In another place a man came up and spoke some queer language that I could not place : he was afflicted with a loathsome skin disease which had reduced his face to a shapeless mass ; the nose had crumbled away beneath the scabby sores and the dim eyes dripped thick gum down the cheeks that in their putrefaction had an unearthly whiteness. A terrifying apparition he was, and I expected to hear him ring the bell that announced the leper's approach.

How do all those waifs and strays of humanity live in the modern world ? On the broiling summer days the sun keeps them alive and some stray alms that they receive in the market-place. But their begging is only desultory, an amateur accomplishment in the intervals of their real job, which is to toast their sores in the sun.

In the market-place it is the beggars who give the

sculptured relief to the blaze of colour made by the various fruits and vegetables : they are the " Caprices " of Goya in this symphony of colour. Imagine the luxuriance of red 'paprika and the masses of tomatoes piled in heaps besides cartloads of water-melons : red, yellow, green on every side and the scent of ground coffee to harmonize with the hoarse babel of voices ; at my side are sellers of beads and tiny, rough-worked ikons who are struggling to make me buy. Both of them have wooden legs which creak, and the whole scene bezomes in my mind a monstrous " Dance of Death " with the clanking of skeletons, the perfumes of flowers mingled with incense and the damp, musty smell of open graves.

The red of the scene turns those grotesque hawkers into vampires ; they are all blood-red : their body is red, their hair red, their nails and beard are full of blood, and the blood flows from all parts of their bodies on to the winding-sheet of Death which envelops them. Their voices become shrieks of Upirs which drive me away for fear they might enter my body to suck my blood. . . .

Near the market-place I discovered the house which had been recommended to me by a Gypsy friend at Cluj. The ground-floor was a small shop filled mostly with copper pots and pans and various miscellaneous objects. From behind great masses of junk a little man emerged. He was dressed in a long frock-coat that was green with age, ragged trousers, heavy peasant boots, and on his head he wore a tattered astrakhan cap. He was an old man and his face was so thickly covered with beard and furrowed with wrinkles that it resembled a waste country whose ravines are overgrown with brambles. In his wild face the silver spectacles gave the one and only touch of normality and they were like windows in a ruined mansion.

When I told him I had come from a Gypsy friend in Cluj and gave his nickname, he extended me the hand of welcome. Gypsies never give letters of introduction, because as a rule they cannot write, but they give you passwords which are generally nicknames, and at the mention of these words the Gypsy houses open their doors. I noticed that

incongruously the old man's dirty fingers were covered with rings. He had a curious impediment in his speech, a mixture between a stammer and a wheeze, and every word was modified by a lisp. As well as Roumanian he could chatter away in French with a faint remnant of a Marseilles accent. "So Monsieur, you want a room, eh? Ah, I have just what will suit you *à merveille* : come, I shall show you."

We then walked along a long, dark passage and my host called out in his wheezy voice : "Paraschiva, Paraschiva," and then I heard a sound of clattering down the stairs and a strange old woman came hobbling towards us. She looked about eighty years of age and she had a most evil face. One of the true Gypsy witches, said I to myself, as she laid a bony hand on my host's arm and made signs to him. She was as deaf as a door-post and he had to bellow into her ear. Finally he was able to make her understand, and she led me to my room.

It was a dark and evil-smelling hole : the only air and light came from a small skylight in the roof ; the whole place, in fact, resembled a superior coal-hole. This lodging they would let me have for twenty lei.

"Ah, Monsieur, vous ne trouverez rien de mieux à Bucharest pour le prix."

Old Paraschiva showed the greatest curiosity in my belongings. When I set my rucksack down on the ragged cushions which covered the bed she grabbed it and began an exhaustive search through its contents. After rummaging among my few shirts she found a bottle and triumphantly held it up saying—"Reci." It was, as a matter of fact, my emergency ration of brandy. I gave both of them a pull and Paraschiva smacked her lips and rubbed her stomach, cackling in a shrill voice.

"Ne lui donnez pas du cognac," said the host, "car elle deviendra une diablesse." He then confided to me that many in the neighbourhood believed her to be a true witch having commerce with vampires and demons. "Everyone is afraid of her : she is able to bewitch the whole lot of them."



'I put away the bottle, but the old hag came and tried to wrench it out of my hand, mumbling some unintelligible words.

### ROMANY REVELS

In the evening I found quite a crowd gathered in the long, low kitchen at the back of the house. Paraschiva was surrounded by a bevy of women who were gossiping away in strident voices : at the other side a group of men were sitting enveloped in the thick haze of their cigarette smoke. There were bottles of wine on the table and the host, who, by the way, was called Zamfir, said to me in a low voice : "Come bea mult vin, isi bea si mintea," a Roumanian proverb which means : "He who drinks much wine drinks also his reason."

I was given a seat near a smoky fire beside Paraschiva and some of the men entertained us with songs at the command of the dictatorial old woman, who could not hear anything softer than a shout.

She presided like a queen over the ill-assorted crowd. Some of the men were dressed as peasants, others were evidently humble city workers from the district around the market-place. A tall youth with a mass of black hair which fell over his face sang in a very hoarse and highly-pitched tenor voice to the accompaniment of a cobza-player. The cobza seemed to me to be a big-bellied guitar, admirably adapted to supporting the singer. The young man put an immense amount of feeling into his performance : he would twist his pale face into every species of grimace and his matted locks would sweep down over his eyes like a drop-curtain ; then his method would become still more dynamic and he would force his voice far above its real compass at the beginning of a phrase and then reduce it gradually down to a more convenient pitch. After some songs of this type there were choruses in which the whole company took part and which were strongly rhythmic. As for me, I kept my eyes on Paraschiva, who though as deaf as a post went on beating an imaginary time with her hobble-stick on the flags of the kitchen. While they

were singing she would take good care to fill her glass and she was soon like Celestina, the Spanish bawd, in temperament.

"La placinte inainte  
la resboiu inapoi,"

"On with the joys of life,  
to the hindmost with war,"

that is her motto," said Zamfir to me. "You will see her become a raging lunatic in a few moments, and then the whole room will be cleared in ten seconds, for every man and woman here is terrified of the old witch. She knows too much about them."

Sure enough she soon began to sway about on her chair, waving her stick in the air in time to the music.

After the cobza-player had ceased and the melancholy young man had subsided from his feverish singing, a little woman rose out of a dark corner and produced a fiddle. She was very small in stature but as sturdy as a mule, and one look at her told me she was a Romany. She was dressed in a dingy black skirt under which she must have been wearing at least seven petticoats: the bodice was black too, but trimmed with faded embroidery and tassels. Around her head she had tied a dark red scarf with the ends hanging half-way down her back. The one distinctive part of her costume was a silver belt which supported the full weight of the heavy skirt. Her hair was of raven black and her skin dark brown, and over one eye she had a black patch which made her remaining eye seem all the more sinister.

As soon as she stood up there was a chorus of acclamation: "Catinca, Catinca," shouted the men, and several patted her on the back, while Zamfir poured out a glass of wine which she tossed off before tuning her fiddle. She played in the barbaric Roumanian Gypsy fashion, slanting her hand on the finger-board and producing the queer, bagpipe tone with ceaseless trills and grace-notes, and when the rhythm would excite the crowd by its hypnotic repeti-

tion, she would whoop and shout in accompaniment to her own playing in order to stress the effect.

Every part of her body moved as she played: her fingers careered on the fiddle, her bow sawed the strings, her gross mouth with the negro lips moved in sympathy with the notes, her feet stamped the rhythm and communicated a Saint Vitus' dance to her whole body. It was all a rasping performance, but strangely exhilarating although the music was mostly pentatonic. Between each period of frenzied fiddling she would halt for a moment, swallow a glass of wine and start off again.

Then a space was cleared and everyone held hands for the dance and the row became deafening, for they all shouted out words to the music. Old Paraschiva did not dance: she was swaying herself to and fro on her chair and waving her stick perilously near the dancers. She was in a bad humour and I guessed that she hated the Gypsy violinist, for I heard her mutter under her breath.

Then suddenly when the music was at its height she lunged forward with her stick and tried to hit Catinca as she played. The blow came down straight on the fiddle and smashed it, sending it flying to the other side of the room. . . .

Then arose such a hubbub as I had never seen.

Through the surging crowd I saw Catinca dart like a mad woman after the old hag: she was waving her bow in the air and hitting out with her other arm at all who tried to prevent her from wrecking vengeance on the fiend who had destroyed her fiddle. Soon by her superhuman efforts she reached the chair near the fire, and then an epic struggle started. Paraschiva laid about her on all sides with her stick: she hit high, she hit low, and in most cases she walloped the innocents, but then the battle became an arm-to-arm encounter between the two women. They went for one another's hair first. The Gypsy's red scarf was torn from her head and her black hair streamed down over her face. Then there were kicks, scratches, blood flowing, shrieks, oaths, the dust of conflict and the smell of sweating bodies.

I hastily retreated to the other side of the room in an alcove which afforded good cover and from there I spied out the land. I saw Zamfir in another corner gazing on the fight with a grin on his face. The amazing feature of it all was the resistance of old Mother Paraschiva : I expected every moment to see her dead body carried off the field of battle. The Gypsy woman was a sturdy mule and she raved and kicked. From scratches the fight reached the pummelling and even the wrestling stage. Clothes were torn to shreds. At one moment I saw one of the Gypsy violinist's breasts gleam through her torn bodice, and as for her face it was as red as a vampire's.

Then suddenly with a blow that would have felled an ox the old hag reached the Gypsy's jaw and knocked her to the ground, stunned. With a contemptuous kick she dismissed her conquered rival and paused for a moment to gaze at the assembled company . . . but only for a moment, for she then started to throw everything she could lay hands upon at the guests ; plates, bottles whizzed on all sides and there was indescribable confusion. When I looked out from under a table that providentially was near me I found that everyone had left save Zamfir, who was silently picking up scraps from the floor.

Paraschiva, who was now as gentle as a lamb, had relapsed into her arm-chair, and there was peace. Soon a sequence of stentorian snores announced to me that her spirit was in repose.

Then I saw various phantoms creep into the room and make their way out by another door towards the bedrooms.

#### LIFE IN A GYPSY BOARDING-HOUSE

Zamfir's boarding-house was certainly a microcosm of human society : there was every type and every possibility of drama in miniature. I was able to catch a glimpse of some of those dramas because the whole house, owing to the thin walls, was a veritable whispering-gallery. Some of the inmates were peasants of the small land-owning class, methodical and sober individuals who had come up from their farms in the country : others were vagabonds of

various descriptions, waifs who had lived as parasites in this rambling quarter of Bucharest. There were Gypsies of the sedentary type who had small trades in the city which they cultivated in the intervals of wandering through the country. Among the women, some were flower-sellers and hawkers, others were actresses and dancers from travelling shows and street-women of the quarter. These humble *cocottes* would bring their temporary lovers to the house and retire to the bedrooms with them after wine had been ordered from Zamfir.

The partition separating my garret from the next was very thin and I was able to hear all the varying drama of two young lovers whom I mentally labelled Calixto and Melibœa. At times their life was all idyll and I knew that there were flowers on the table, however empty the swain's purse. On those days the young girl would sing in a clear voice as she opened wide the windows. She was a wild little thing with great hazel eyes and very white skin. When I heard her sing in the morning I knew that life was smiling on them that day, but it was not always so : there were mornings dark and threatening when I heard the muffled oaths of the husband ; he was despondent, for it was hard to earn enough to keep them in food and lodging even in Zamfir's boarding-house. One evening he came back in a black humour, for I heard them quarrelling and quarrelling, and then the woman shrieked and started to cry in a monotonous tone. Soon afterwards there was a shriek and a thud : he had hit her and she had fallen to the ground.

In another room a woman was expecting a baby and I could hear her moaning in a long-drawn-out wail, while every now and then there were voices of women soothing her. Then farther down the passage I could hear the ribald laughter of Stanca, one of the prostitutes of the house. She was a lively girl who had come from Hermannstadt and was a Saxon born with fair hair and blue eyes. She had come of peasant stock but had been seduced by a salesman from Bucharest and had run away with him from home. After some months he had abandoned her and she

was left on the streets pregnant. Stanca was a devoted mother to that child of her ill-starred love and her one thought was to provide for its welfare. She had one room in Zamfir's house and there she kept her child. When any of her rough male visitors would make too much noise she would put a finger to her lips and point to the white cradle where the infant was sleeping peacefully. I am sure that Stanca was a veritable Maya to every visitor : to one she would give consolation, for he had been deceived by an unfaithful wife : another would tell her of the inferno at home where ruled a cross-grained mother-in-law. She would be the goddess of complete womanhood to whom men go for consolation. The peasant would find in her the romance that he was unable to find in his women at home, and for this reason she would deck herself out in her cheap trinkets and put rouge on her face and powder too, so as to dazzle them by her exotic charm. Then when the men had departed and her baby would cry through the night, I would hear her sad, low voice singing *doinas* as she lulled it to sleep.

#### I AM CURED BY A GYPSY WITCH

I had every opportunity of working out in my own mind the various dramas of the neighbouring rooms and the damp corridor in Zamfir's house, for I had the misfortune to fall ill there. I awoke one morning with a high fever and a sensation that all my bones were on fire. Like one of the lost souls I started to struggle against the demon of Asthma. I tossed about gasping in the suffocating cubby-hole of a room, with the feeling that the next second would be my last.

At first the spasm went on increasing in violence, and although I burned herbs ceaselessly there was no relief. Then Stanca, when she smelt the pungent smoke, rushed in to me in alarm, thinking the whole house was on fire. When she saw the herbs burning beside my bed, she concluded that I was adopting some power of witchcraft to cure myself, and she whispered in my ear : "Let me call old Paraschiva : she will soon relieve you of your pain."

That was the last thing in the world I should have wished, for I had visions of the old hag's touching me as she exorcized my evil spirits. I was, however, unable to explain to Stanca that I wanted to be left alone, and soon she brought most of the inmates of the house into my room.

Nothing in the world is more distressing for asthmatic patients than to be surrounded by people at a time when they long for a wide expanse of desert where they may be alone. My stuffy room was full of a chattering mob who surrounded my bed and gazed at me with inquisitive eyes. In my fevered imagination I began to see them in a distorted dream. Their voices sounded far away amid a ceaseless buzzing sound: their eyes glittered in the faint light of the candle and their arms seemed to curl in spirals like the coils of a snake.

Then old Mother Paraschiva appeared: it was late at night and she was deep in her cups, hence more like an avenging fury than ever. She hobbled up to the bed and gazed at me so fixedly that I thought she would have mesmerized me. Then she suddenly waved her stick at the other people in the room and told them to go out and leave us alone. Silence. . . . She sat or rather crouched on the ground at the foot of the bed and continued to gaze at me without saying a word. "Now I am in for a bout of devil-doctoring," said I to myself, "and Heaven knows what dreadful cure this old shaman will impose upon me." What could I do? I felt too ill to resist, and the proximity of the old woman made me breathe even more spasmodically.

All the memories of what I had read of Gypsy wizardry crowded before my mental eye.

"Ki shan i Romani  
adoi san i chovihani."

"Wherever the Gypsies go,  
there are witches I know."

Alas! O Leland and Wislocki, why did you afflict me with the craze for Gypsy folk-lore? The old woman in my imagination became every moment more like a voodoo

as she gazed at me without saying a word or moving a muscle. Her face seemed to become more malevolent because she felt convinced that I was possessed by some evil spirit and her task was to drive it out.

The silence was becoming unbearable and I was sinking under the hypnotic influence of Paraschiva's fixed stare. She was becoming the true devotee of Laverna, the Roman goddess of thieves and vagabonds who was always worshipped in silence.

Mentally I repeated the incantation of the impostor in Horace who hardly dared to move his lips.

At length she started to moan in a monotonous voice a strange incantation, the words of which were incomprehensible to me, and as she chanted she moved her hands slowly to and fro in a regular rhythm.

I felt myself gradually sinking into a helpless drowsiness, although I struggled hard to keep awake. . . .

Paraschiva's body seemed to melt away until all that I could see of her was her head and . . . it was no longer that of an old hag. It was the pale face of a young woman, fair-haired, with eyes which shone like stars. She then transformed herself into a huntress and dashed through the skies, followed by a host of witches mounted on broomsticks. She was still the beautiful woman, but the lower part of her body was changing into that of a cat and chasing the starmice of the night. She did not touch me, for I was protected by the sacred Linden-tree of Mary Magdalen, with its heart-shaped leaves which are strong enough to withstand all the magic in the world.

Behind the bevy of witches followed a huge black dog : he was the dread vampire Priculics, who at night changes into a dog and sucks the blood of human beings. The air was full of smoke and the scent of burning saffron was overpowering : drums were beating in measured cadence and then I heard in the distance the *bucium* or shepherd pipe play the tune of twelve fevers.

The strange goddess had now become the crescent moon and her horns deluged me with wine :

"I drink the wine, but it has already changed into the



blood of Diana, goddess of the moon, and it flows through my veins, giving me vigour and health. Hail to the Queen of all witchcraft, the goddess of the silver light that illuminates the realm of dreams."

★      ★      ★

The door suddenly opened and my dream vanished in thin air.

Paraschiva stood beside my bed : she was more hideous than ever. I noticed that she held something in her hand.

There was a touch of cajolery in her voice as she handed me a ball of some white substance, making vigorous signs that I should swallow it at once. I examined the ball. It was made of some kind of grease most unpleasant to look at : hidden in it were what looked to me like several squashed spiders and flies.

At first I thought that the old woman merely wanted me to touch my mouth with it and then throw it away. But her gestures became so imperious that I determined to conquer my feelings of repugnance and swallow the loathsome object.

I have since ascertained that the effect of the cure was to drive out the evil spirits that had given me the illness, and the ball was made of bear's grease, which is a sovereign remedy among the Gypsies : the spiders and flies were antidotes against the evil spirits.

After commending my soul to God and reciting a Hail Mary, I gulped down the salve.

Next day I ceased to be ill : I preferred not to try Paraschiva's cure again.

*Songs and Magic Dances of Roumania*

WHO said the Roumanians were not able to enjoy themselves? I had been told that there was not *Mulatni* in Roumania, but I soon found that a *petrece* was the equivalent of the Hungarian word. And if a *petrece* means to amuse oneself with Gypsies, then Roumania also pays its court to the god of rhythm.

At Craiova I made the acquaintance of a wandering Roumanian violinist called Vasili—a ragged, emaciated, tousled minstrel who wanders around the country from his native village Sadovă playing *horas*, *învârtitas*, *doinas* and all the gamut of the country's popular music. He was tall, thin, sallow, with a long nose and a very melancholy expression. There was not a trace of wildness about him: none of the fiery energy of Magyari Imre or the Oriental mystery of Alecsandru. He was much more primitive in his playing, for his technique was moulded to the strange little trills and grace-notes of Roumanian music; his tone was small and wiry; and he held his left hand in a slanting position under the neck of the fiddle so that the fingers slid on the notes. This gave the variable intonation of the bagpipe to his playing, but as soon as he started to play a *doina* he thrilled me.

The *doina* is the characteristic song of the Roumanians, full of plaintive melancholy and suggests the Celt, but it is far more highly ornamented with arabesques of grace-notes and it calls back to mind the ancient church modes. With Vasili I used to wander through the villages and play for the women in the farm-houses. As they sang the *doinas* I was reminded of the Irish peasant songs or else the dances of the Galicians in Spain accompanied by the *gaita* or bagpipe. At Braşov I had met Monsieur Brediceanu, the

great Roumanian folklorist, and he had given me collections of the *doinas* and dances, so when Vasili turned to me and asked me to play I would strike up a tune like the following :



and all would start singing afresh. Then from the *doinas* we would pass on to the quicker dances such as the *Brău* or the *Batută*. The *Brău* resembles a fast rondo played at a vertiginous pace. Sometimes it is performed by men only and the peasants possess an amazing acrobatic skill in dancing it, for they continue until completely exhausted. Vasili told me that there were peasants in the mountains of seventy years of age who were so hardy in their bodies that they could dance the young men off their legs. The *Brău* as played by the Roumanian Gypsies reminded me again of Irish folk-music with its reels, but there was more frenzy in it. Even the monotonous repetition of the phrase gradually increasing in speed, with its festooning grace-notes, hypnotized the listener and called up primitive passions in his heart.

Then from the active *Brău* the minstrel would pass to the grave and dignified *Hora*, which is a dance of untold antiquity in the country. The dancing of the *Hora* is a communal affair and is associated with the open spaces of the villages when all the peasants and their women meet together. The dancers formed up in a circle, moving their legs up and down, and in the centre stood Vasili and a companion fiddler playing away. Brediceanu, in his collection, gives a characteristic *Hora* which comes from the Banat, one of the richest provinces for folk-music in the country. The first phrase might easily be a dignified minuet of Haydn or Mozart, whereas it comes from one of the most primitive parts of Europe :



In the second part, which is in the minor key, the barbaric strains appear in the shape of the queer little grace-notes.

Vasili and his companions were kept busy in the Roumanian countryside, for the peasants were always on the look out for fiddlers, and on Friday evenings the village of Sadovă would be crowded with people searching for musicians to play at the marriage ceremonies which always are held on Saturday.

When the people were gathered together the musician was expected to play various descriptive songs and dances which would tell a story. On one occasion Vasili played a piece called the "Song of the Shepherd," very traditional in character. The song describes first of all the mournful thoughts of the shepherd who has lost a sheep. He wanders disconsolately over hill, over dale, searching fruitlessly. The music becomes more and more feverish and excited as he searches and searches. At last the sheep appears and the song ends with the frenzied merriment of the shepherd. Another melody often played was called "The Sick Man's Dance," in which Vasili gave us a picture of all that was grotesque in a man quaking with ague. The music shivered and quaked as the patient tossed to and fro singing a strange melody full of wildness. All this music was very primitive and suggested Gypsy wizardry and devil doctors. The people seemed to take a delight in the stranger dances such as *Ochiu Dracului* or the "Eye of the Devil," and when Vasili at last would stop playing and wipe the perspiration from his brow they would pummel him on the back and shout at him to continue.

The attitude of the peasants towards the Gypsy in Roumania struck me as being even more contemptuous than in Hungary. To them he was an object of scorn and they would fire off joke after joke at his expense. Even the young boys would come up behind Vasili and pinch his backside as he played or tousle his hair, and the girls would take a pleasure in mimicking his gestures to his face. Then when they did not like his playing they would curse him for a rotten Tzigan and quote the Roumanian proverb

which says : " If the Gypsy does not play well, break his head with his own fiddle."

Their attitude towards me was rather curious, for they could not imagine what in the world had ever brought me into the company of a disreputable Gypsy. The older peasants would draw me aside and say : " Where do you come from? Are you German? Why do you wander with Gypsies?—they are no good : they steal." They always had a kind word for me, nevertheless, and they would shrug their shoulders and think I was a mad foreigner.

One of my principal objects in wandering with the Roumanian Gypsies was to observe what we might call the magic rites of music. When we go back far to the beginnings of the history of music we arrive at magic incantation. Incantation is the prototype of musical art and everything has sprung from that. Music and poetry spring from oral magic as the two horns of the lyre do from the base of the instrument. From the practices of magic man passed to religious faith and organized cults : from faith he arrived step by step at the direct feeling for nature ; and those three stages are those of the history of music.<sup>1</sup>

In Roumania many of the magic dances are performed in order to bring down rain and save the crops. When I was in Sibiu the Saxon peasants told me that they used to dance in front of the church in order to bring a good harvest. The people must dance faster and faster until the perspiration rolls down their faces, for perspiration symbolizes rain, which fertilizes the fields.

One day when I was with Vasili in a village we saw a crowd of peasants seize a little Gypsy girl and strip her of her shift. The girl laughed and made little protest when her brown body was exposed. Then the bystanders took leaves and grass and dressed her up in them till only her head was visible and she became a Miss Jack-in-the-Green. Singing songs they led her through the village street, and people came up with jars full of water and poured it on the girl until she was dripping from head to foot. While the ceremony was going on the people sang songs which,

<sup>1</sup> G. J. Combarieu, *Histoire de la Musique*, Paris, 1920, Vol. I.

according to Vasili, had the power of drawing down the rain. The custom is called *Paparuda* or *Papaluga*, and is found in other countries of the Balkans as well as Roumania. Beza says that the word in Vlach for *Paparuda* is *Pirpiruna*, and there is an expression : s'feage pirpirună, she was made *Pirpiruna*, used for someone who has been thoroughly soaked by rain. The word means poppy, because in some places it is customary to adorn the Gypsy-girl victim with those flowers. The poem sung by the peasants is the following :

“Paparuda—ruda  
come and wet us,  
that rain may fall,  
with water pails :  
to make the corn grow  
as high as the hedges,  
to increase the crop  
and fill the barns.”

I was curious to ascertain why the peasants seized a Gypsy girl and made her the victim of the *Paparuda*. Vasili said that the Gypsies all over Roumania must submit to every indignity, and he told me of the custom in Bucharest on a certain day of the year of casting a fully-clothed Gypsy into the River Dambovița as expiation. It used to be held by the ignorant folk that the Gypsies were the cause of drought, because dry weather was the best for their industry of brick-making, and for this reason they would punish them by the *Paparuda*. In India, according to Sir J. G. Frazer, there is a similar custom when the people dress a boy up in green and call him King of the Rain. The important part of the ceremony would seem to be the song, for music among primitive races plays a great part in winning the god of rain. There is in Roumania another more striking dance connected with rain. The young girls of a village march out in a procession to a spring. They take some clay and fashion a figure in the shape of a man. Then they make a little coffin and after many lamentations they bury the little figure in it. After three days have

elapsed they return again to the burial-ground, and after digging up the coffin and extracting the clay figure, they dance around it with exultation, for the rebirth of the year has taken place : the rain will fall and the crops will revive: Before they throw the clay figure into the fountain they sing.

“ Jan Caloian,  
go to Heaven,  
open the gates,  
and let loose the rains  
to run down like the streams  
night and day.”<sup>1</sup>

Beza, in his book on *Paganism in Roumanian Folk Lore*, quotes another song which is sung in connection with the “ Caloian ” :

“ Jan Caloian,  
Your mother sought you,  
broken-hearted,  
through deep woods  
and through the glades ;  
Jan Caloian,  
With burning tears  
Your mother weeps for you ! ”

This song brings us deeper into the mystery of the whole ceremony. The Mother of Jan Caloian is no other than the Earth Mother, the goddess Cybele, who was looked on by the Phrygians as mother and spouse of the beautiful Attis. The ceremony resembles closely the cult of Osiris, whom the Egyptians believed to have been slain by his brother. But his sister searched for him over hill, over dale, and gathered his limbs together one by one and imparted new life into them.

From the beginning the cult of the Earth Mother and the lover youth had connection with water, for in the east of Europe with its dried-up plains, does not water signify fertility? Then came Christianity and adopted for its purpose the legends and cults of Pagan religions, and in our ceremony Adonis or Attis became John, who

<sup>1</sup> M. Beza, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-36.

was surnamed the Baptist owing to his relation to water. In Western Russia to-day it is said that women on the day of Saint John make a figure from branches and herbs to represent the Baptist, and they throw it into the water.<sup>1</sup> So that Caloian is the equivalent of Adonis, coming from Kalo-Jan, "beautiful John." In the minds of some of the peasants the whole ceremony is associated in a remote way with the Blessed Virgin when she wandered about searching for the youth Jesus, who was haranguing the elders in the temple. Thus does Christianity adopt the beliefs and customs of Pagan antiquity to its own ends, and I remembered the basilica of Saint Mark in Venice, where there is an ancient altar to Poseidon with dolphins and tritons sculptured on its base. When the Christians brought it from the East they turned it into a baptismal font without blotting out the Pagan symbols. The feast of the "Caloian" is held in the period of the Assumption, and is that not a further proof that in the minds of the people the Virgin Mother is the survival of the Earth Goddess Cybele?

Among the Gypsies the ceremonies connected with water are legion. We have referred before to the customs performed by the bridal pair which are connected with water. The water goddess is called Nivashi and is the most powerful of all deities. She must be placated on every occasion, and if she is consulted she can answer questions put to her. When a Gypsy mother suspects that her child is evil-eyed she carries it to the nearest stream and holds its face close to the water and repeats :

"Water, water, hasten  
look up, look down :  
much water hastens,  
may as much come into the eye  
which looked up on thee  
and may it now perish." <sup>2</sup>

If the running brook makes a louder sound than usual,

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, Vol. I, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> Leland, *Gypsy Sorcery*.



then the woman believes that what it says is that the child is enchanted. Sometimes the spirit of water is not a female, but male, and the Gypsies call him the *Wodnamuz*, a "water man." He is a sinister monster and lies in wait for people in order to drag them down to the depths.

Sometimes in order to placate the spirits which haunt the world and terrify men it is customary to form brotherhoods of magic with fixed ceremonies. In Roumania to-day there are still survivals of those ancient brotherhoods and the wanderer may see them on certain feast days. These magical associations survive from untold antiquity in this land which lay under the direct influence of the god Dionysus.

On the feast of "All Souls" in Roumania there are dances performed by the brotherhood of the Hobby Horse dancers. They must always be in odd numbers, seven, nine or eleven. They meet out in the country on an early morning under the leadership of a man carrying a sword. The rest of the dancers carry poles and the leader crosses his sword with the club of one of the dancers. In former days under the sword and club a wooden horse's head was shown, the symbol of the dance. All the dancers then dance together to a special tune which is played by the Gypsy violinists who are with the band. Béla Bartók, in his collection of Roumanian dances, gives the following tune which is played on the occasion :



The dancers with the poles beat them in rhythm and produce a weird ponderous effect. The Hobby Horse dance is a miniature drama, for each performer plays a special part. There is the flag-bearer, the Dumb dancer who must keep silent during the dance, and must act

the part of clown and crack his whip in order to frighten away the evil spirits. Then in the middle of the dance one of the performers pretends to feel faint and sinks to the ground. The others gather round him and say that he is dead. He is then carried away, and two remain to mourn over him while the others retire. Suddenly he comes back to life again and the dancing starts again with renewed gusto. As Vuia and others have shown, this dance is the survival of the ancient ceremonies of the god Dionysus, who was worshipped by various associations such as the Kouretes in Crete, the satyrs in Thrace, and the *salii* or dancing priests in Italy, who used to act in gesture the life of their hero and pour libations to the god. Even to-day the water rites have survived, and that is why the dancers meet near fountains and fill jugs with water. The leader also ties a garter of bells to the ankles of each dancer and sprinkles them with water from the jugs and calls on them to pray to a certain Irodeasa, whom they must placate. In some places a goat was represented in the Hobby Horse dancing because of the association with the satyrs of Dionysus, the god of fertility. The presence of the goat reminded me of a curious pre-christian feast which survives in the west of Ireland, called the Puck Fair. The Tinkers in the little town of Killorglin, who belong to a special caste called the Coffeys, dance and break out into a Bacchanalian brawl and in the centre of the room a tethered goat is the king of the feast. The feast seems to have the same significance as the Roumanian Hobby Horse dance and to be a survival of a rite that was celebrated in honour of the god of fertility. In the Roumanian dance the satyr-element has left the symbol the hobby horse and it is called *Călușar*.

## *Epilogue*

### PASSING THROUGH THE IRON GATES TO THE END OF THE JOURNEY

I AM on a small peasant-boat gliding up the Danube. The day is dark, and the rain falls pitilessly, beating its monotonous drip, drip into my heart. Not a song do I hear to-day as I lie on deck, for everyone is mournful and wearing a hangdog expression. There are crowds of peasants on board, and we are herded together in the one dry spot on deck. Some are sleeping on the ground, others on benches and tables. I have a Bulgarian woman's face right up against me on one side and a Serbian child's fist sticking into me on the other. At my back a Greek boy is snoring, and on the table in front, coiled up, lies a Roumanian Orthodox priest. As our ship advances we add to our numbers, for at each stopping-place peasants come on board, laden with their baskets. The Danube is the great Father of rivers, and on its waters one may meet the citizens of many countries. Its flood harmonizes every discord and nationality and its spirit is the spirit of pan-Europe. There are Greeks, Turks, Russians, Bulgarians, Roumanians, Hungarians, Serbians and Italians on board and the spry little steward in the white coat accepts payment in the ten different exchanges. Whenever a peasant hands him a note in some foreign exchange, he calmly turns over a page in his notebook and works out the correct figure without saying a word.

I feel sad to-day because it is the end of my wandering. When I see the spires of Belgrade I shall cease to be a Gypsy, for I must then leave the ship and take the train back to Italy and the life of everyday. Just now we are approaching the famous Iron Gates that mark the end of the East and the beginning of the West, and I

feel that it is time to begin to say farewell to the Indian Romanies and turn my thoughts to the Western world. The Iron Gates themselves are not impressive, for the name was given by the Turks to the rapids near the town of Orsova because they were so difficult to navigate. I expected to find huge, beetling mountains and dark caverns through which the flood of the Danube would boil and surge, whereas on all sides there is flat, uninteresting scenery. But beyond Orsova the scenery becomes grim and majestic with the Kazan Defile. Here there are sheer limestone precipices, hundreds of feet high, which threaten to fall upon us. Here are the true Iron Gates where some cataclysm of nature has wrenched the boulders and hurled them from the bowels of the earth at the moon. The river eddies through the gorge, which is only about one hundred and ninety feet wide, and our ship seemed about to be swept round by the maelstrom. As we advanced the water became narrower and narrower, and the cliffs towered higher and higher so that the light was shut out by the gloom.

Scattered here and there along the rugged coasts are little villages and at rare intervals a castle perched upon a crag, but there is very little habitation along the banks of this melancholy river. As dusk descends over its yellow flood the shadowy banks disappear from sight in a mist.

Hardly a sound can I hear except the drip, drip of the rain and the slight vibration of the engines.

At nightfall began for me the Flea Witches' Sabbath. I have never felt so many: they are everywhere. I fancy I can hear them hopping merrily from one human being to another. Merrily, merrily they dance and dance. First they attack one side of you, then another—bang! You hit your neck, but just miss the Puck-like insect which has hopped for safety to the face of yonder Bulgarian lady, but she does not feel the stinging caress and continues her serene, musical snore.

I wonder whether fleas have the power of scenting the stranger? Does his blood taste sweeter to their jaded

palate than the bloods of Bucharest and Belgrade's folk which are their daily pabulum? I can imagine a flea separating all of us into categories. One would say: "For me the blood of the white-fleshed Irishman; it tastes sweeter than that of yonder tawny Tzigan, who has nurtured countless generations of our race." And so they reasoned, and I tossed to and fro in my attempt to escape their caresses. Gradually my efforts became a rhythm and I found myself dancing the dance of the fleas.

I then remember a story I had read of the origins of the fleas, and as it is Roumanian I shall relate it against the fleas of that country.

When Noah built the ark and set out on the waters, the Devil, who never loses a chance of doing evil, set to work to destroy the ark, and he bored a hole in the vessel. Then Noah was in despair, for the water began to pour in, and he called all the animals together and asked them to help him, but no one could. Suddenly the snake spoke up to Noah: "What will you give me, master, if I deliver you from the danger?" And Noah answered: "What you will." Then the snake stopped up the hole with the tip of his tail and the ark was saved. Then the snake went to Noah and asked for his reward, and Noah told him to choose. The snake said: "You are to give me a human being every day that I may suck his blood." Noah, when he heard this request, was very angry, for there were mighty few human beings on earth and the world would end at once if he were to hearken to such a notion. So he seized the snake and cast it into the fire. Then a terrible stench arose and mounted so high that it soon reached the nostrils of God. Being greatly displeased with mortals He sent a wind which scattered the ashes of the snake all over the world. From these ashes sprang the fleas, and so numerous are they that if we take them all together, they suck the blood of a whole human being every day, thus fulfilling the Promise of Noah.

The story, when I recalled it, filled me with despair and I realized that I was the scapegoat on the ship, for

all those peasants and Gypsies were immune, and in my mind I associated the attacking fleas with greater powers, for is it not held by the Roumanians that the flea is the Devil's horse on which Satan rode when he started his war with God!

After the Flea Witches' Sabbath I tried to settle down to sleep, but my mind refused to rest and insisted on dwelling upon the various incidents of my journey. It was with melancholy that I thought of the morrow when I should have to face the duties and responsibilities of life. Soon the days of idling and adventure would be things of the past. Now that I had passed through the Iron Gates from the eastern lands of fantasy I should have to justify my own life. For the vagabond a sunny day was its own justification and it did not need the aid of reason. When I felt vigorous I walked and when my legs were weary I rested. There was no need to do obeisance or pay compliments to anyone, for I was my own master. When I did not like my friends I disappeared like a thief in the night and no one bore me any grudge. Money was of no supreme importance to me beyond giving me the bare necessities of life. My wants were few and I had always found the truth of the adage: "The Lord will provide."

Of course there are many disillusionings lying in wait for the man who sets out with a fiddle to play his way and consort with the tramps along the road, but all of them sink into insignificance when compared with the joys that come to him. The greatest joy of all lies in the consciousness that he has the whole world open before him. In spite of all the restrictions that are placed upon vagabonds by government officials who consider them rascals and pests of society, the roads and fields are still open, and in countries like Hungary and Roumania, where the peasants are models of hospitality, the tramp who can play a tune will always find hearty welcome. Among the Gypsies who in those parts of Europe still play the parts of minstrels we may hear many a beautiful tale and melody told amid surroundings that intensify their beauty.

All literature and all music originally sprang from such troubadour songs and melodies, but we who are weighed down in our minds by the masses of printed literature and music have forgotten it. And yet any literature or music that is going to live in the world must have sprung deep from the soil like the folk-tune which is the elaborated production of generation after generation of anonymous artists. To-day the poets and musicians are exploring new fields and attempting to increase the powers of expression of each art, but before they can increase those powers they must turn simple sons of nature again and wander over hill, over dale, for their inspiration. They must turn Gypsy and say with the old Gypsy in *The Gypsy Maiden*, by Cervantes : " We are Kings of the fields and prairies, forests, mountains, springs and rivers. The woods furnish us with branches, the trees with fruit, the vines with grapes, the torrents with water, the bushes with game. . . . For our steeled limbs the hard ground is as soft as eider-down, for our rude skin is like an arm of defence or a coat of armour. No eagle or bird of prey more promptly pounces upon a booty once perceived. We sing in prison, but are silent under torture ; we maraud in the daytime and steal at night ; or rather we remind people not to forget where they hide their property. We prefer our ragged tents to gilded decoration, marble palaces and pictures to the Flemish School where landscapes will not compare with Nature's beauty. The lofty, arid rocks, the icy mountain summits, the vast prairies and thick forests—they all belong to us as soon as we set foot there, and all smile at us the moment they appear to our sight."

Modern life is cruel to the vagabond because society sets as its one object the reducing of everyone to the same level. The statesmen of the different countries are the enemies of Nature because they try to drive her out of well-ordered lives. No wonder the vagabond turns his back on the cities, where the ideal is work for the sake of work, and avoids those dull, grimy streets with the perpetual train of smoke from factory chimneys. Why

should humanity sell themselves as slaves to the machine to become soulless robots, having lost all desire for the life of freedom? I wish to rove again among the Gypsies where there are still coppersmiths who make pans by hand, wood-makers who carve by hand, and women who wear hand-embroidered smocks. I wish again to play in the Gypsy bands where one may improvise and ornament, according to the flash of the moment, the melodies that will make the peasant sing and wander away from the jazz bands that reproduce the latest machine-made piece of vulgar triviality.

And so I reasoned with myself alone on deck on that dark night as we swished through the waters of the Danube. Gradually I fell into a dose, and all at once I seemed to be transported into another world. I was in a great big city which seemed to be an amalgamation of London and New York, and I was wandering aimlessly down a street in the midst of an excited mob. Everyone was discussing the grave news that War had been declared. This War would be more terrible than any others, for the famous Death Ray would be used by both sides, the forces of invading aeroplanes would render life above Earth practically impossible, and the scientists would extinguish the lives of civilians by their tubes of bacteria.

Then I heard a terrible maelstrom.

I watched sky-scrapers fall into heaps as though a terrible earthquake had ripped open the bowels of the earth: every object seemed to fly into splinters and revolve around me like whizzing meteoroids. The world was breaking in pieces and yellow and black vapours nearly suffocated me. Through the mist I could see countless cog-wheels whirl round and round and then suddenly crack and fly off in all directions. After another huge explosion there was silence and I felt myself soar up through the mist like a bird. The clouds disappeared and I found myself in clear blue sky. The earth was green and covered with forests. I stood on a hill and watched a band of men climbing up towards me. They



wore brown cloaks and leather boots. Some of them were coppersmiths, for they carried several pots slung round their shoulders, and others carried serpents round their arms and musical instruments. They camped near where I was standing and one of them made a fire on which he threw certain herbs. Then all of them sang a strange song to some goddess who was their protectress. After watching them perform their rites I approached the band and spoke to the leader. He told me that they were Gypsies and were wandering through Europe, engaging in work in the various countries. "You know," he said, "since the terrible Catastrophe we have been in great demand. All the industries perished and mankind is unable to do aught save the simplest tasks. You see, they lived by mechanical contrivances formerly and all the machines perished, so we Gypsies are worth our weight in gold to them as artisans."

Then I was transplanted in my dream-world to a medley-constructed city, which had sprung up on the débris of old, and I saw no more smoke. In every street there were artisans fashioning wooden ornaments and working in clay. There were handlooms and spindles everywhere, and as the girls worked they sang songs to the rhythm of their hands. At the end of one street I came to the Mayor's palace and floated into his presence. What was my surprise to find that he was my old friend Rostás, the ragged Gypsy violinist, with whom I used to roam. Rostás came down to meet me and led me up to his throne. Then at a sign from his sceptre, a band of Gypsy violinists, followed by one man carrying a cimbalom, entered and took up position in front of me. As they played, countless phantoms seemed to spring to life beside them and dance. The dance became more and more frenzied and the music was a buzzing in my ears; then the sound became colour and I seemed to sink into a red cloud. . . .

I was stiff and rheumatic. My clothes were soaked and a bitter breeze stung me. The dawn was breaking, and the wan light gave the ship the appearance of a

phantom vessel. Gradually the sky grew paler and the black clouds disappeared. In the distance I saw the spires and pinnacles of Belgrade. My vagabonding was over.

BELGRADE,

*September, 1929.*

## *The Library of a Gypsy Lover*

### A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INITIATION

ANY disappointments and disillusion fall to the lot of the Romany Rye who fondly imagines he may fraternize with the first band of Gypsies he sees camping outside the arch of the city, but for the man who wanders after the Raggle-taggle folk through books there is romance and adventure on every page. The journey through the realms of the imagination is free and untrammelled : we can sail through the world on the magic carpet or put on the seven-league boots : we can knock at any tree in the forest and enter fairyland through its little door. The true Gypsy-lover after a spell of wandering on the Gypsy trail returns to his library and pulls down the dusty volumes written by others who felt the romantic appeal of the Romany, and thus he creates a balance between reality and fantasy. The first Gypsy that ever entered my life came out of the pages of literature. It was Meg Merrilies, the witch of *Guy Mannering*, that fascinated me when I was a child of seven years. I have several times met Meg Merrilies in the flesh, but I have never known her as intimately as I did when Scott introduced her to me in childhood. At school in England Borrow educated my vagabond personality, but the lesson he taught me was one of revolt against fifth-form classics and Eton jackets. Borrow appealed to the Irish in me and he introduced me to the fairest woman I have ever known : Isopel Berners. I have tried to find Isopel in England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and most of the European countries. She towers over all the heroines of the nineteenth century. Instead of finding Isopel I came across Mérimée's Carmen, mantilla and all, with a flower hanging from the corner of her mouth, "et elle s'avavançait en se balançant sur ses hanches comme une pouliche du haras de Cordoue." The recollection of Isopel and Carmen has never left me and they have made every journey as sentimental as Sterne's. I would not teach Isopel how to conjugate the Armenian verb to love, but I would play the fiddle to her and soften her heart by

music. With a fiddle there would be no need of the Tinman's fists or Don José's knife.

After Borrow and Mérimée had introduced me to the Gypsies and I had met them in various countries in Europe, I began to read the works of Leland, on whom fell the mantle of Borrow. Leland had not the genius of Lavengro, but he was a greater scholar and he possessed the true Gypsy spirit. Nobody has ever understood so profoundly the secret gospel of the witches, the cures of the shamans or wizards, the jargon of tramps, vagabonds and their lore. It was owing to his influence that the Gypsy Lore Society was founded in 1888 and the interest of scholars and artists awakened in Gypsy affairs. The *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* is one of the most fascinating collections in the world, for it is International, and scholars from all over Europe, as well as America and the Far East, contribute studies of Romany history, folk-lore and language. For many years the Society was presided over by the greatest Romany Rye of all, the late Dr. John Sampson, librarian of Liverpool University. With the exception of Paspatis, no Romany Rye has ever understood the wandering folk as John Sampson did. His book on the dialect of the Welsh Gypsies and his great collection of folk-tales are treasure-houses of quaint expressions and beautiful turns of phrase. His work is a monument of patient scholarship, but it is far more than that. If we glean the lore scattered through those pages, we shall cease to talk foolishly like a "gorgio" and learn the simple wisdom of the "Romany chal": we shall hear the wind on the heath and understand the songs of the birds and trees. As a Gypsy-lover I wish to express my indebtedness to the three series of the Gypsy Lore Society, especially to the articles of Leland, Wlislöcki, Groome, Gilliat-Smith, Sampson, Winstedt and Thompson.

Those that wish to study deeply Gypsy manners and customs should consult the *Gypsy Bibliography*, by George F. Black, Ph.D. (Gypsy Lore Society Monographs, No. 1), Edinburgh, 1913. The following short bibliography is only one of initiation into Gypsy lore. To all those books I express my indebtedness: some of them have always accompanied me on my travels.

#### GEORGE HENRY BORROW

*The Zincali; or an Account of the Gypsies of Spain.* John Murray, London, 1841. Accounts of customs of the Gypsies in Spain, their language and the jargon of robbers. The "Gitana" of Seville resembles closely the description of Carmen by

Mérimée, and Professor Northup of Chicago University has proved that Mérimée was the borrower in *Mod. Phil.* XIII, 1915.

*The Bible in Spain.* John Murray, London, 1843. Describes the adventures of Borrow in his attempt to circulate the scriptures in Spain. Many consider this Borrow's greatest book of adventure.

*Lavengro; the Scholar—the Gypsy—the Priest.* John Murray, London, 1851. Is autobiographical. Describes the author's early life in Ireland. Introduces us to Isopel Berners in Chapter LXXXV.

*The Romany Rye; a Sequel to "Lavengro."* John Murray, London, 1857. Tells us more about Isopel Berners and describes many adventures of the author.

*Romano Lavo Lil: Word-book of the Romany or English Gypsy Language.* John Murray, London, 1874. Borrow, though he was the first writer to win universal recognition for his books on Gypsies, was not the first to describe their customs. For many centuries the Gypsy had appeared here and there through European literature, especially in Spain, where the Picaresque novels set the vogue for the knavish hero. Cervantes, in *La Gitanilla*, has given one of the best descriptions of the essence of the Gypsy spirit, though Preciosa, the heroine, is not a Gypsy type. The first book of importance on Gypsy history was *Die Zigeuner*, by Heinrich Grellmann, Dessau und Leipzig, 1783. This book was translated into English by Matthew Raper, P. Elmsley, London, 1787. Grellmann was the first to discover that the Gypsies were an Indian race.

In 1844 a great advance in Gypsy scholarship by the publication of *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*, by August Friederich Pott, Heynemann, Halle, 1844-5. 2 vols. At the same time Bataillard began to publish his celebrated articles on the metal-working Gypsies in Europe and their origin. Gypsy scholarship was systematized by Ascoli and Miklosich. Then came Alexandre Paspatis and united erudition and literature in his beautiful book, *Études sur les Tchighingians ou Bohémiens de l'empire Ottoman*. A Koroméla, Constantinople, 1870. This book is invaluable as a study of the language of the Gypsies in Turkey, one of the purest dialects of Romany. Paspatis was a born collector and he describes his adventures with gusto. In his book he includes stories taken down by him verbatim which are full of the wild poetry of tent-life.

## CHARLES GODFREY LELAND

*The English Gypsies and their Language.* London, 1873. Very interesting chapters on Gypsy words passed into English slang. Indications of the Indian origin of the Gypsies, Gypsy stories and fables.

*The Gypsies.* Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1882. Describes a visit to Gypsies in Moscow and also to Austrian Gypsies in Philadelphia. There is also a chapter on the Shelta, the secret language of Tinkers, which Leland was the first to discover.

*Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-telling.* T. F. Unwin, London, 1891. This is the most important book on Gypsy magic and is illustrated by many incantations from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Roumania, etc. It is a book to be studied profoundly by anyone who goes among Gypsies in the East of Europe.

*Aradia or the Gospel of the Witches.* David Nutt, London, 1899. Contains account of Diana and her daughter Aradia, the patroness of witches, also the Sabbat, Tana or Diana, the moon goddess and incantations to the moon and spells to win love.

## HENRIK WLISLOCKI

The greatest authority on the Gypsies in Transylvania. Dr. Wlislöcki published a grammar on the Transylvanian Gypsy dialect and many books on the Gypsy folk-lore of that country which he had studied in his life among the roving bands.

*Aus dem Inneren Leben der Zigeuner.* E. Felber, Berlin, 1892. The most interesting of his books for its description of marriage customs, rustic magic, death rites, etc.

*Vom Wandernden Zigeunervolke.* Hamburg, 1890. Describes the life, customs, tabus, speech, etc., of the Gypsies living in the Saxon part of Transylvania known as Siebenbürgen.

*Märchen und Sagen der Transsilvanischen Zigeuner.* Nicola, Berlin, 1886. Contains some of the most beautiful of the Gypsy fairy tales.

## FRANCIS HINDE GROOME

*In Gypsy Tents.* W. P. Nimmo, Edinburgh, 1880. Describes Groome's experiences among the Gypsies of England.

*Gypsy Folk-tales.* Hurst & Blackett, London, 1899. Very interesting historical Introduction. Collection of Gypsy legends and fairy tales from Hungary, Roumania, etc. They are taken from Wlislöcki, Paspatis and others.

## JOHN SAMPSON

*The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales.* Oxford University Press, 1926.  
The most monumental work on the language of the Gypsies. Welsh Romany is still a living Gypsy tongue. John Sampson shows here how picturesque is the language spoken by these wanderers. The Welsh Gypsies are the descendants of an ancestor Abram Wood, king of the Gypsies, who was born in the seventeenth century, and the dialect they speak has been religiously kept intact in the Cambrian Mountains. Sampson's method of approach was like that of Paspatis: he followed the clan, mixing with the fiddlers, harpers, fishermen and basket-makers. In the Gypsy Lore Society's Journal he also published a great quantity of Gypsy folk-tales from Wales.

*The Wind on the Heath: a Gypsy Anthology.* Chatto & Windus, London, 1929.

## IRVING BROWN

*Nights and Days on the Gypsy Trail.* New York, 1922.

*Gypsy Fires in America.* New York, 1924.

*Deep Song.* Harper. New York and London, 1929.

Irving Brown, who is a professor in Columbia University, is one of the true Romany Ryes. He has made a special study of the wandering Gypsy tribes in U.S.A. and his second book describes his experiences with them. *Nights and Days on the Gypsy Trail* and *Deep Song* describe his adventures in Spain, where Gypsy song is called "cante jondo," or deep song. He has included in the latter book many examples of Gypsy poetry.

## GENERAL HISTORIES OF GYPSIES

*A History of the Gypsies*, by Walter Simson. Edited with notes by James Simson. Sampson Low, London, 1865. Very interesting chapters concerning the Scotch Gypsies. Is a combative book.

*Gli Zingari: Storia d'un popolo errante*, by Adriano Colocci, Ermanno. Loescher, Torino, 1889. A good account of history, customs, language, literature, music, religion, geographical distribution of the Gypsies.

*Historia y Costumbres de los Gitanos*, by F. M. Pabanó, Montaner, Barcelona, 1915. Good account of Gypsies in Spain.

## HUNGARY

The wanderer through Hungary may best learn of the Magyar character by reading works of Maurus Jókai, the great romantic writer (1825-1904), such as: *'Midst the Wild Carpathians, An Hungarian Nabob, Black Diamonds, The Day of Wrath*, all of which have been translated by R. N. Bain.

In *Der Zigeunerbaron* and other stories Jókai describes the lives of the Gypsies.

*Travels from Vienna through Lower Hungary*, by R. Bright, M.D. Edinburgh, 1818. Interesting Accounts of Gypsies. There is an appendix containing a list of Gypsy words.

*Hungary and the Hungarians*, by W. B. Foster Bovill. London, 1908.

*Hungary and its People*, by Louis Felbermann. London, 1892.

*Europe*, by Count Keyserling. London, 1928. Contains one of the most sympathetic essays on Hungary. Pp. 177-214.

## TRANSYLVANIA

*Transylvania: its Products and its People*, by Charles Boner. London, 1865.

*The Land beyond the Forest*, by E. Gerard. Edinburgh, 1888. 2 vols. An excellent book, full of information concerning Hungarians, Roumanians, Saxons as well as Gypsies. Some of the Gypsy legends quoted I found still current among the Transylvanian Gypsies.

## ROUMANIA

The wanderer through Roumania should read the folksongs of Vasili Alecsandri, many of which were collected from Gypsies: *Ballades et Chants Populaires de la Roumaine*, Paris, 1855. Then he should read the stories of Creangă and the plays of Caragiale. *Recollections of Ion Creangă*. (Trans. by L. Byng, London, 1930.)

The alluring books of Panait Istrati such as *Présentation des Haidoucs, Domnita de Snagov and Mikhaïl* (Paris, Editions Rieder) show a wilder picture of Roumania.

*Roumanian Bird and Beast Stories*, by Moses Gaster. London, 1915. A fine collection of legends and incantations current among the Roumanian peasants. There are quaint superstitions connected with the plague of bugs and fleas and other noxious insects. I have quoted in the Epilogue the story of the flea's origin. Dr. Gaster is the author of the informative article on "Gypsies" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th Ed., vol. 12, pp. 37-43. He has also published Rou-



- manian Gypsy tales in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (3rd series).
- Paganism in Roumanian Folklore*, by M. Beza. London, 1928. A charming book containing much information on Moon lore, the Paparude and Kalojan dances, the customs of St. John's Eve, Sacred Marriage and the Hobby Horse Dance. It should be read in conjunction with vol. I of *The Golden Bough* by Sir J. G. Frazer.
- Originea Jocului de Calușari*, by Romul Vuia, Dacoromania, Year-book of the University of Cluj, 1922. Contains a complete study of the origins of the Hobby Horse Dance and photographs of the dancers.
- Peasant Art in Roumania*, by George Oprescu (Autumn no. of Studio). London, 1929.

## MUSIC

## HUNGARY

- Des Bohémiens et de leur Musique en Hongrie*, by Franz Liszt. Leipzig, 1881. English translation by Edwin Evans: *The Gypsy in Music*. London, 1926. This is the greatest book on Gypsy music, written as an explanatory prologue to the rhapsodies. A long-winded book, but contains the finest descriptions of Gypsy music. Some of Liszt's theories have been attacked by Hungarian critics such as Bartalus, Brassai, Bartók, from a musical as well as an ethnical point of view.
- Hungarian Folk Music*, by Béla Bartók. Oxford Press, 1931. This is the English translation by M. D. Calvocoressi. An invaluable guide to Hungarian music. Bartók divides the subject up into the Old and the New Peasant Music and Miscellaneous Class. He gives the words of the songs and the music (320 examples).
- Transylvanian Hungarians. Folksongs*. Edited by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. Rózsavölgyi, Budapest. (150 examples.) Explanatory introduction in English.
- Hortobágyi Pásztor-és Betyár-Noták*, by Dr. Ecsedi Istvan. Debrecen, 1927. Description of the singing of the cowboys and shepherds on the Hortobágy in Hungary with examples of songs and music.
- Regi Magyar Urak*, by Markó Miklós. Budapest. An account of the well-known Gypsy minstrels in Hungary from the days of Czinka Panna, 1711-72, down to to-day. Illustrated with photographs.

- Collection of Hungarian Songs.* Bárd Ferencz, Budapest. 3 vols. The works of Bihari, Czermak, Czinka Panna, Lavotta, etc., are edited by Zsadányi Armand. Rózsavölgyi, Budapest.
- Magyar Népdalok*, by Mátray Gabor. Budapest, 1854. Collection of Hungarian songs, some of them as old as the sixteenth century.

## ROUMANIA

- Chansons Populaires Roumaines*, by Béla Bartók. Academia Română. XIV. București, 1913. Contains 371 examples of songs and dances, many of them recorded from the violin playing of Gypsies and from flute-players. We find here every type of Roumanian music.
- Volksmusik der Rumänen von Maramures*, by Béla Bartók. Drei Maskra Verlag, München, 1923. Interesting account of Roumanian folk music with collection of songs and dances. Written with a Hungarian bias.
- Doine și Cântece Poporale Românești.* Songs by Tiberiu Brediceanu. Brașov, 1928. 9 vols.
- Jocuri Poporale Românești.* Piano solo, by Tiberiu Brediceanu. Brașov, 1928. 9 vols. Tiberiu Brediceanu is the greatest collector of Roumanian folk-music, and in these collections of songs and dances he has printed a small part of the immense material he has gathered together in the past twenty years around his native town of Brașov and in the Province of the Banat.

## *List of Gramophone Records of Gypsy Music*

THE student of folk-lore will find the most characteristic examples of Magyar folk-music recorded on the phonograms stored in the Ethnographical Section of the Hungarian National Museum. Those collections, which contain 7,800 tunes, were started in 1898 by Béla Vikár and continued by Béla Bartók, Kodály and László Lajtha up to 1914. They include tunes from many of the distant villages in Greater Hungary.

In Bucharest at the Ministry of Art and Culture there is a collection of phonograms of Roumanian folk-music from every region of the country. The task of arrangement and supervision is directed by Dr. Breasu. The phonograms, which are small in size and cylindrical in shape, record the singing and playing of many Gypsies as well as peasant folk-singers from the villages. The provinces of the Banat, Dolj, Oltenia, Mureş and the Bukovina are particularly rich in musician Gypsies. The two villages of Cală Ciuturoiă and Sadovă, near the town of Craiova, are celebrated among the peasants for their Gypsy performers. Many of the records from Oltenia which I heard in the Bucharest library had been made by a village Gypsy woman fiddler called Paraschiva Tchim, who possessed the true devilish rhythm in her fingers. The Gypsies frequently play a "Tiganească," or Gypsy tune, which they call "Romanească." There are in the library many records of the Hobby Horse Dance, with its bagpipe prelude and its insistent, beating rhythm. Among the Roumanian peasants every function of life seems to have its special dance: there are dances of hens, dances of flowers, dances of priests, dances of marriage, sickness and death.

The following short list of gramophone records is taken from the Hungarian and Roumanian catalogues of the Columbia Company, London.

### HUNGARY

*Berkes Béla and Gypsy Orchestra*

- D 8127 { Hullamszó Balaton tetején.  
          { Kis csolnakom a Dunán lengedez.

- D 31022 { Csak egy Kislány van a Világon.  
Lent a faluvégén nem füstöl a kémény.  
Repülj fecském.
- D 8448 { Huszár mulatság.  
Betyár mulatság.
- D 8126 { Fehér rozsa csárdás.  
Debrecenbe kéne menni.  
Lányok, lányok hallgassátok.  
Pipacs csárdás.

*Banda Marci and Gypsy Orchestra*

- D 8449 { Este későn éccaka.  
Fehér kendőt lobogtat.
- D 8450 { Korcsmárosné az angyalát.  
A mellényem begombolom.  
Elment Julcsa a vasarra.  
Nagy a feje, busuljon a ló.

*Magyari Imre and Gypsy Orchestra*

- D 8215 { Sárga rózsá.  
Reszket a bokor.
- D 8219 { Szeretnék május éjszakákon.  
Piros pöttyös ruhacsárdában.  
Széchenyi csárdás.
- D 8218 { Levelem, levelem.  
Ahogy én szeretlek.  
Befordultan a konyhára.
- D 8217 { Fa leszek.  
Szabad-e.

Many other records by Magyari Imre may be obtained from Rozsavölgyi, Budapest.

*Basilides Maria with Berkes Béla (Voice and Orchestra)*

- D 31036 { Cserebogár.  
Zöldre van a rácsoskapu festve.  
Nem akar az ökörcsorda legelni.  
Érik a, érik a, buzakalász.

*Viddk Béla with Berkes Béla. Tárogató and Orchestra*

- D 31025 { Eltörött a Hegedum.  
Csinom Palkó.  
Krasnahorka Büszke vara.

## ROUMANIA

*Grigoras Dinicu and Gypsy Orchestra*

- DV 76 { Hora boerească.  
           { Ca pe luncă.  
 DV 77 { Hora lui Teişanu.  
           { Sârba şi Hora din Teiş.  
 D 8566 { Ceasornicul (Dinicu).  
           { Hora Calu (Popular).  
 D 8412 { Doina Oltului.  
           { Ciocârlia.

FOLK SONGS of *Tiberiu Brediceanu*

- D 8366 { Cântă puiul cucului. (*Voice, violin and piano.*)  
           { Ştii tu mândro.  
 D 15654 { Bleja la panoramă. (*Monologue by Corascu.*)  
           { Măi Timişe apă rece.  
 D 31182 { Trec Zilele cu nopţile. (*Tenor solo.*)  
           { Eu mă duc mândro azi mâine.  
 D 30951 { Ma uitai din deal în vale. (*Tenor solo.*)  
           { Cine m'aude cântând.

FOLK DANCES. *Pavel Horvat's Orchestra*

- D 8405 { Dans National din Cluj.  
           { Romanţa din Ajud.  
 D 8406 { Ca la Făgăras.  
           { Abrudianca.  
 D 8407 { Ca la Sighişoara.  
           { Căluşereasca.  
 D 8408 { Ca la Orăştie.  
           { Haţegana (Brediceanu).  
 D 8410 { Selişteanca.  
           { Doina Bănăţana.

## FOLK SONG AND CHORUS

- D 8579 { (1) Colinda. (2) Plecareea Magilor (Kiriatic).  
           { Mos Crăciun (Kiriatic).  
 D 8580 { Morarul (Kiriatic).  
           { Lugojana (Kiriatic).

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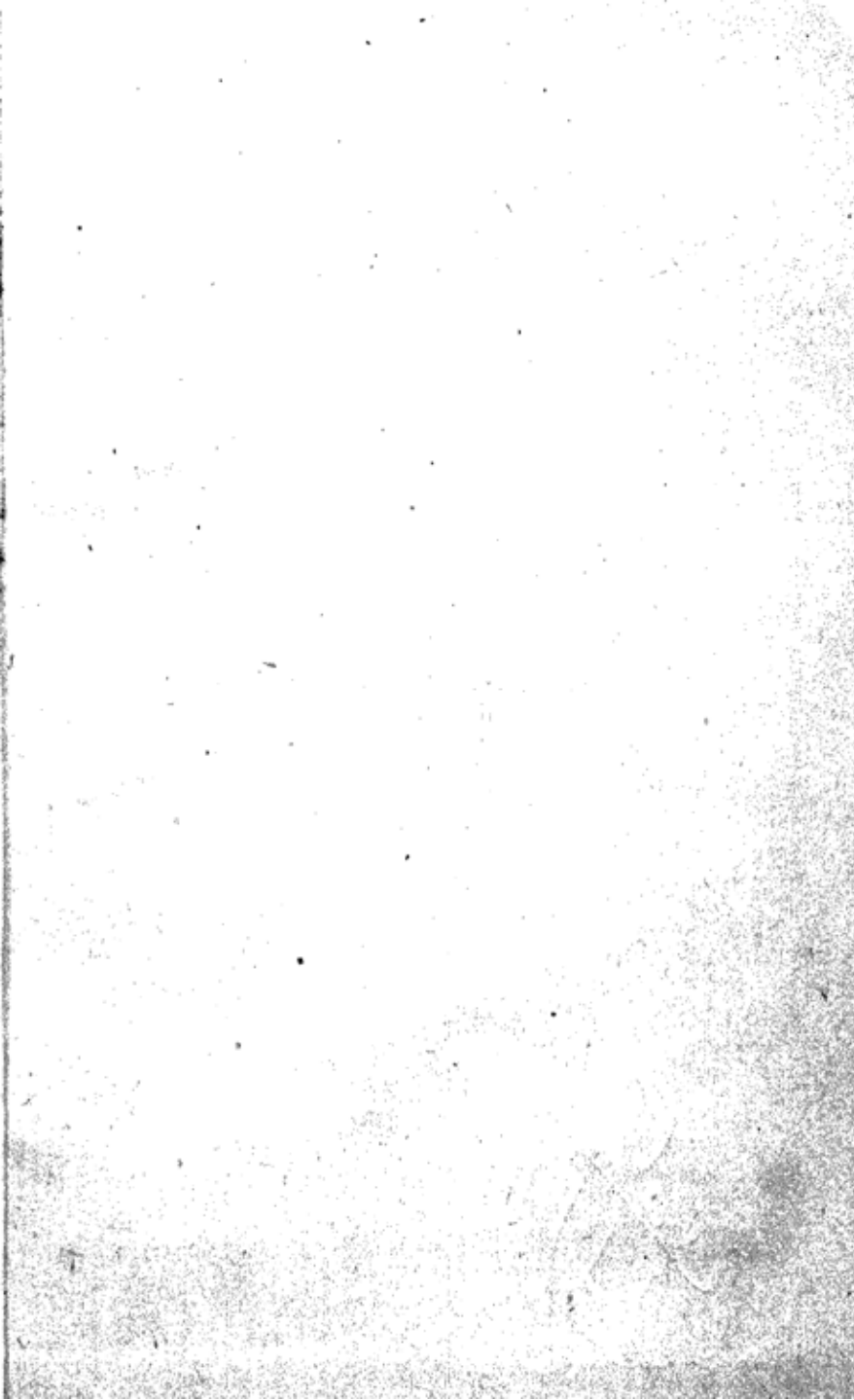
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